

# Teacher Inquiry in New Zealand: A Montage

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## **Abstract**

The study took place in New Zealand where teachers inquire into their practice to learn professionally. Teacher inquiry is a unique policy because it combines personal and professional motivations to learn. This policy places expectations on teachers to inquire into the impact of their teaching actions in terms of student learning.

I used a narrative inquiry approach to gain insight into teachers' inquiry experiences. I conducted single, unstructured interviews with eleven, primary school teachers to listen to their stories. This narrative approach brought to the fore subjective conceptualisations of teacher inquiry and allowed me to use teacher stories as a construct to understand teacher inquiry further. I structured this thesis as a series of stories about context, methodology, inquiry experiences, deconstructive explorations, and impressions of the teacher inquiry puzzle.

A central research question, "How can teacher inquiry be conceptualised from teachers' experiences?" guided the research process. This question grew into two sub-questions that featured different aspects of teacher inquiry. The first sub-question, "What are teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry?" enabled me to expose the experiential effects of teacher inquiry. These idiosyncratic perceptions challenged me to think differently about teacher inquiry and prompted me to ask another sub-question, "What insights into teacher inquiry can be gained from applying a deconstructive lens on teachers' inquiry experiences?" To answer this question, I examined particular elements within teachers' experiences and used these elements to create deeper discussions about teacher inquiry. Since these deconstructive explorations tended to diverge from teacher stories, they allowed me to illuminate further complexities within teacher inquiry. I used these stories and deconstructive explorations to create a montage of teacher inquiry in New Zealand.

This study highlights how teacher inquiry can affect teachers' professional learning experiences, their teaching practices and professional identities. It brings to light the diverse ways that teachers make sense of internal and external expectations to learn professionally. I used this nuanced understanding of teacher inquiry to provide suggestions on how teachers can be better supported in the inquiry process. It is important to continue to strengthen the teacher inquiry process because it can ultimately contribute to student learning. These teacher inquiry insights can add to continuing discourse on teacher learning, because they explore the complex challenge of using teacher learning as a means to improve student learning.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Erik.

Thank you for always believing in me.

## **Acknowledgements**

I extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisors,

Professor Letitia Fickel and Professor Janinka Greenwood.

Thank you for allowing me to wander and wonder in my own space.

I also want to acknowledge the eleven teachers

who took a chance on a doctoral student

who believes in the power of stories.

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# **Part One: The Canvas**

## **Priming and Stretching the Canvas**

Decentralisation

Self-Managed Schools

The Treaty of Waitangi

Historical Student Underperformance

The Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration Programme

Teacher Inquiry

Teaching Designations

## **Taking a Closer Look at Teacher Inquiry**

Illuminating Different Aspects

Framing the Montage

## **Part One: The Canvas**

Teacher learning is a priority for educational stakeholders. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2013a) described teachers' professional development as a "key policy lever" because they believed that it can be used to shape the education system (p. 18). The substantial amount of resources that governments around the world invest in designing and implementing teacher learning initiatives is testament to this belief. These investments have intensified the need to influence, monitor and evaluate the "quality of educational outcomes and educational provision" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013a, p. 17). Educational policies make targeted efforts to prioritise and improve student learning because this is one of the core purposes of education.

The underlying assumption in this movement is that teacher learning can be shaped to make an impact on student learning. In this light, teacher learning becomes an attractive means to influence teaching performance and enhance student learning. These initiatives call for teachers to become professional, lifelong learners. This need for continuous professional learning is normalised through regulatory or certification requirements for teacher registration (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2015; Ontario College of Teachers, 2012; The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012; United Kingdom Department for Education, 2011). This normalisation establishes teacher learning as a necessity, an inherent responsibility and a sign of professionalism.

Efforts to link teacher and student learning have exposed the underlying complexity of learning. Learning can be imagined as a complex process that is susceptible to internal and external stimuli. The internal and external shifts that can occur place physical, intellectual, emotional and social challenges upon the learner. When these shifts are considered in terms of teacher learning, it becomes more apparent how personal and professional learning



motivations are entangled. These motivations that compel teachers to learn and grow professionally are also susceptible to the influence of school cultures, educational policies and contextual factors. This confluence of personal, professional and contextual factors alludes to the difficulty of designing teacher learning initiatives that can sustain teacher learning needs, satisfy multiple agendas and generate measurable student learning outcomes. These issues testify to the ongoing need to study, debate and reflect on teacher learning initiatives. It is through this continuing attention that we may find alternative ways of implementing, influencing and enhancing the professional learning experience for teachers.

In this thesis, I explore teacher learning through the eyes of teachers. I prioritise teacher voice through their stories. I used their storied insights as a basis to question and deepen my understanding of teacher learning. This study was conducted in New Zealand, where teacher inquiry is a form of teacher learning. In this study, I define teacher inquiry as a flexible form of professional learning that teachers use to learn personally and professionally from their practice. I composed a central question, “How can teacher inquiry be conceptualised from teachers’ experiences?” to guide the research process.

This narrative study highlights the subjective meanings teachers ascribed to their inquiry and learning experiences, and the contextual issues that they encountered in their inquiries. These stories were gathered through single unstructured interviews with eleven primary school teachers. This interview approach encouraged teachers to share their particular conceptualisations of professional learning and teacher inquiry. Since this study contains limited collaboration with teachers, I reconstructed teacher stories to feature their voices prominently because I wanted to honour their views. I adopted an appreciative mindset to interpretation and used these storied views to magnify the challenges within teacher inquiry. I used a deconstructive lens to extend, reframe and uncover nuanced aspects around teacher

inquiry. These deconstructive explorations exposed some of the complexities of using teacher learning as a means to improve student learning.

The knowledge contributed in this thesis will be of interest to policy makers, educational researchers, teacher-learning facilitators, school leaders and teachers who are interested in understanding the complex nature of teacher learning. In this thesis, I used stories to exhibit and extend the narrative truths in lived insights. These constructed truths enable people to describe, communicate and make sense of their experiences. I used storied perspectives to formulate alternative questions about teachers' professional learning and teacher inquiry. This allowed me to reveal some of the intricacies involved in implementing, monitoring and promoting professional inquiry and learning. These insights can contribute to existing discourse on teacher learning, and provide further knowledge on how teacher learning initiatives can be enhanced to provoke significant professional learning experiences.

### **Priming and Stretching the Canvas**

This thesis discusses contextual issues, policies and histories that may be foreign to readers who are not familiar with New Zealand's educational system. I wrote this introductory section to briefly describe the areas that are relevant to my discussion of teacher inquiry.

#### *Decentralisation*

New Zealand has a national education system which has been described as the “most decentralized system of school self-management in the developed world” (Wylie, 2012a, p. 1). This decentralised structure was implemented in 1989, when the Labour government launched the “Tomorrow's Schools” reform. The decentralised system replaced an educational structure that was centralised and bureaucratic. The reform distributed educational responsibilities across several government agencies; the Ministry of Education, the Education Review Office, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. The Ministry of

Education oversees the education system by establishing and implementing educational policies that regulate the New Zealand Curriculum, the National Educational Guidelines, school funding, and resource allocations. The Education Review Office is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority regulates the standards for educational qualifications. These government agencies perform evaluative and assessment functions to ensure the quality and cohesion of the educational system.

In addition to these government agencies, the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, also serves as an independent professional body that regulates the certification and teaching standards for teachers. In 2016, this council replaced the New Zealand Teaching Council that was previously a government agency. There are strong links between this council and the Ministry of Education because the nine governing members of the council are vetted by the Ministry (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2016b).

### *Self-Managed Schools*

One of the main thrusts of the Tomorrow's School reform was the devolution of educational administration and responsibility, which materialised as school self-management. The self-governed structure gave parents the ability to elect their own board of trustees, who overlook the functioning of the school, school principal and staff. These changes gave schools increased capacities to cater and respond to the needs of their local communities. Even though schools were still answerable to the Ministry of Education, they had more authority over their school's vision, values and strategic plans (Wylie, 2012a, p. 1). This transformation gave schools the ability to customise finances, school resources, staffing, the school charter and curriculum (Levin, 2011, p. 74). To support these changes, school leaders assumed larger responsibilities for all aspects of schooling. Levin (2011) stated that school principals had to

“work harder and spend more time on non-academic matters” because they had to manage the overall functioning of the school (p. 74). In addition to these administrative and managerial responsibilities, school principals also became pedagogical leaders. They were given more latitude to address school improvement efforts, which included planning and structuring teachers’ professional learning and development initiatives. There was an increased need for school leaders to possess strong “pedagogical leadership” skills in teaching and learning (Wylie, 2012a, p. 175). These responsibilities placed immense pressure on school principals to juggle multiple demands.

The reform also granted parents and students more choice over schools. The decision to implement a consumer- and service-driven approach to education was driven by market-based ideologies. Since a market perspective of education thrives upon healthy competition between schools, it was believed that this competitiveness could increase the quality of education and school efficiency (Fiske & Ladd, 2000, p. 62). This approach to education assumed that between-school competition could work as an incentive and impetus for school improvement and quality. School competition was touted as a potential means to lift the underachievement of Māori students and to lessen the number of Māori students who were leaving school without adequate qualifications (Wylie, 2012b, p. 78). In reality, the marketisation of education did not live up to many of its intended ideals because schools became more competitive, self-focused and independent (Wylie, 2012a, p. 108). Schools were more likely to safeguard their own interests and tended to promote their school in the best light to increase student enrolment (Wylie, 2012a, p. 108).

Self-management may have affected the inequity in educational outcomes and left some schools lagging. Instead of thriving in competition, lower-decile schools with higher concentrations of Māori and Pasifika students have found it difficult to survive (Wylie, 2012b, p. 106). In New Zealand, schools are divided into deciles for the purpose of

government funding; the lower the decile, the more funding the school receives from the government. A school's decile is an indicator of the "socio-economic position" of its student community" (Ministry of Education, 2016c). As a result of the reform, many lower-decile schools and low-income communities struggled to secure and retain experienced school leaders, board of trustees, and teachers (Wylie, 2012b, p. 121). These challenges made it more difficult for them to provide their student population with consistent quality in teaching and learning opportunities.

It is apparent that the self-managed school structure has had a profound effect on the educational landscape. The reform has been described to be "paradoxical" in its attempt to cater to social, economic and political agendas (Crossley, Hancock, Sprague, & Brock, 2015, p. 162). Juggling these agendas may have reduced efforts to provide marginalised student populations with more support and attention. The decentralised nature of evaluating and reporting on student learning has complicated school improvement efforts. It has made formal initiatives to identify and promote "good practices between schools" difficult (May, Cowles, & Lamy, 2013, p. 3). The self-managed aspect of schooling has hampered efforts to promote collaboration between schools because it may be less beneficial for schools to pool their expertise, resources and knowledge (Wylie, 2012a, p. 242). According to Wylie (2012a), the current structure is "too dispersed" because there are "few systemic ways for knowledge to coalesce in timely and useful ways" (p. 9). This suggests that the difficulties in implementing, evaluating and monitoring student learning will continue to be a challenge within self-managed schools.

### *The Treaty of Waitangi*

New Zealand is a small, commonwealth nation of approximately 4.6 million people that is made up of diverse ethnicities. Māori are "tangata whenua" or people of the land; the

indigenous peoples of New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi is an agreement that was signed between Māori and the British Crown in 1840. Since this Treaty was signed in two languages, Māori and English, the differences in interpretation have caused historical conflict (Orange, 2012). The Pākehā (Europeans) population outgrew the local Māori, which inevitably overrode Māori ways of knowing the world (Hayward, 2012).

In the 1970s, the Māori renaissance challenged the monocultural landscape that was predominately Pākehā to become more bicultural. This raised tensions around the interpretative differences in the Treaty of Waitangi, which led to the Treaty being formally acknowledged as a founding document that promoted biculturalism (Hayward, 2012). Since the Treaty was promulgated as an Act in 1975, there have been various statutes ratifying Māori interests such as the Māori Language Act in 1987, that recognises te reo Māori (Māori language) as an official language and the incorporation of Māori interests in school charters under the Education Act of 1989 (Barrett & Connolly-Stone, 1998). These steps have enabled Māori to regain more recognition as the indigenous peoples of New Zealand, and it has promoted New Zealand as a bicultural nation. These historical events were highlighted because they have affected the educational system and the learning experiences of Māori. Some of the issues that I address in this thesis require use of Māori terminology. I have provided appropriate translations and italicised them for clarity.

### *Historical Student Underperformance*

In educational policies, the Treaty of Waitangi has been used to justify efforts to provide Māori with equal opportunities to quality education. According to national studies, 45% of Māori students live in “neighbourhoods of high deprivation, compared to 12% of Pākehā students” (Grant, Milfont, Herd, & Denny, 2010 (as cited in Ell & Grudnoff, 2013, p. 75)). While there have been increased efforts to introduce “*kura kaupapa Māori* (Māori-language

immersion schools)”, where “*te reo* Māori and *tikanga* (Māori ways of knowing and doing)” are embedded into the school curriculum, most Māori students are “taught in English-medium classrooms” (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013, p. 75, emphasis in original). There have been numerous initiatives to improve the cultural awareness and knowledge of teachers who teach Māori students. Despite these efforts, Māori students have continued to underperform academically. They are “over-represented in most negative social, educational and economic indices” (Bishop, 2003, p. 222). Since the educational “disparities” between Māori and other student populations were “first statistically identified” in the 1960 Hunn Report, there has been limited success in addressing these inequalities (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009, p. 735).

According to the Education Review Office (2008), there are a “disproportionate representation of Māori students” in literacy intervention programmes, as well as a “high proportion of Māori students represented in the lowest achievement levels” in standardised tests such as Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (p. 13). According to Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, and Fung (2007), these “ethnically stratified disparities” have persisted since the 1990s in both literacy and numeracy tests (p. 2). These disparities have been described as “variances within schools” where particular student populations outperform others (May et al., 2013, p. 45). In New Zealand, these patterns of underachievement have been referred to as the “long tail of underachievement” where a disproportionate number of Māori and Pasifika students continue to be located at the lower end of the achievement scale (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013, p. 74). Their continued underachievement may indicate that the self-managed schooling structure has not made a significant impact on Māori student learning (Wylie, 2012a, p. 108).

To make this situation more prominent and urgent, the Education Review Office (2012a) has explicitly identified “Māori and Pasifika students, students with learning needs and students

from low socio-economic backgrounds” as priority students (p. 4). This heightened focus is hoped to increase the awareness and emphasis on the learning plight of these student populations.

### *The Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration Programme*

There have been numerous policies that focus on lifting educational achievement and learning. In recent years, teacher learning has been featured as a means to improve student learning through the Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration programme. This programme promotes quality teaching as a means to raise learning underperformance (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. 16). It was initiated as a “knowledge-building strategy” that employed an “evidence-based” approach to inform educational policies (Alton-Lee, 2004, p. 2). In the first synthesis, the “Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling” Best Evidence Synthesis, Alton-Lee (2003) premised that quality teaching could make an impact on historical patterns of “under-performance” (p. 5). She outlined general characteristics that teachers could adopt to provide quality teaching practices that could meet the needs of diverse student populations (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. vi). This advancement normalised demands for quality teaching and highlighted a need for teachers to be more accountable for their actions.

In 2007, the Teachers’ Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration synthesised research evidence that focused on teacher learning. In this synthesis, the authors established that teacher learning could be strategically designed to improve student learning (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlv). They introduced the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle that formalised teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning. This inquiry cycle advocates for teachers to inquire into their practice and to reflect on “how their particular approaches and teaching emphases have contributed to existing patterns of student learning and achievement” (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlv). This emphasis on existing



patterns of student learning and achievement can be interpreted as an explicit call for teachers to address the learning experiences of Māori students. While there have been other professional development programmes aimed specifically at culturally-responsive approaches to improve Māori education such as Te Kotahitanga, He Kākano and Ako Panuku (Ministry of Education, 2016d), teacher inquiry has been promoted as a systemic form of teacher learning that can make a difference to the learning experiences of Māori students.

### *Teacher Inquiry*

Teacher inquiry is a form of teacher learning advanced by the Ministry of Education. While teacher inquiry has been implemented as a teacher learning policy, the term “teacher inquiry”, as outlined by agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office, may differ from teachers’ lived interpretations of teacher inquiry. As such, I have chosen to use the term “teacher inquiry” to encompass both formal and informal understandings of teacher inquiry.

In the following paragraphs, I will briefly outline how teacher inquiry has been implemented through formal agencies. Before teacher inquiry was introduced as a teacher learning policy in 2007, the Ministry of Education sponsored several prominent professional learning and development initiatives that promoted inquiry-based or inquiry-driven teacher learning. In 2001, the Numeracy Development Projects engaged teachers in inquiry-based mathematical teaching and learning practices (Nicholas & Lomas, 2010, p. 189). In 2002, the Assess to Learn project used an inquiry approach to facilitate teachers’ professional development (Poskitt & Taylor, 2008, p. 7). In 2004, the Literacy Professional Development Project used the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to guide teachers through their inquiry process (Dreaver, 2007, p. 3). The positive outcomes of these initiatives paved the way for teacher inquiry to be implemented as a teacher learning policy.

Teacher inquiry has been implemented in multiple ways. In 2007, the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle was introduced through the Teachers' Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis (Timperley et al., 2007). Its introduction coincided with the introduction of the "teaching as inquiry" cycle (Ministry of Education, 2007), which was promoted as an effective teaching strategy. The "teaching as inquiry" cycle depicted the value of inquiring into the impact of teaching. It was based on the "teaching as inquiry" model that Aitken and Sinnema (2008) published in the Social Studies Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration. In this publication, they defined teacher inquiry as an investigative process that promotes "evidence-informed pedagogy" (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 53). In addition to examining the impact of teaching, they also encouraged teachers to critically evaluate the values within teaching strategies.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education encouraged primary school teachers to explore how the "teaching as inquiry" cycle can be used as a "self-review tool" (2009b). This encouragement associated teacher inquiry with the assessment process in the National Standards policy (Ministry of Education, 2009b). In 2010, the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (2016c), mandated professional inquiry as a criteria for teacher certification. After this, the Education Review Office suggested that incorporating teacher inquiry into schools' performance management systems could make it a more "sustainable" form of teacher learning (Education Review Office, 2011, p. 4). This conception of teacher inquiry may have shifted the purpose for teacher inquiry from a form of teacher learning to a form of teacher evaluation. These varied implementations demonstrate an integrated and explicit drive to ensure that teachers are inquiring into their practice.

The teacher learning focuses vary in these inquiry cycles and models. In an attempt to unify the value of formal and informal teacher learning initiatives, the Education Review Office (2009b) published the term "professional learning and development" (p. 4). This unified view

of teacher learning conflates the formality of professional development and informality of professional learning. Professional development is often associated with top-down and formal teacher learning initiatives that impose predetermined agendas whilst professional learning is more strongly associated to bottom-up and informal teacher learning initiatives driven by teachers (Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke, & Baumert, 2011, pp. 116-117). These structural differences hint at differences in teacher autonomy and motivation, which can affect how teachers experience and construe the purpose of professional learning.

In this study, I have chosen to use the terms “teacher learning”, “professional learning”, “professional development” and “professional learning and development” synonymously. I made this decision because the teachers I listened to tended to mix the meaning within these terms loosely in their stories. Instead of these terms, they used different phrases to distinguish between formal and informal ways to learn. These distinctions enabled them to highlight the differences between personal and professional motivations to inquire and learn professionally.

### *Teaching Designations*

There are several kinds of teaching designations in New Zealand: provisionally-registered teachers<sup>1</sup>, practising teachers, teaching school leaders, and school leaders or principals.

Provisionally-registered teachers are beginning teachers who have completed their initial teacher-education programmes. The Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand grants them a provisional teaching certificate because they have yet to acquire adequate experience or skills to fulfil the practising teaching criteria (2016a). These teachers will undergo a

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<sup>1</sup> The term “provisionally-registered” was updated to “provisionally-certificated” teachers in 2015.

minimum of two years of “induction and mentoring” to become practising teachers (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2016a). With this interim certification, they seek opportunities to teach and pursue professional initiatives that would enable them to fulfil the twelve criteria outlined for practising teachers. When they fulfil these criteria, they become practising teachers. Practising teachers are certificated teachers who have the practical skills, knowledge and experience to fulfil the practising teacher criteria outlined by the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In addition to these teachers, there are teaching school leaders who can be middle- or senior-school leaders who have teaching, managerial and administrative responsibilities. Teaching leaders must meet the criteria outlined for practising teachers. These teaching leaders can be known as teacher leaders, associate-, deputy- or vice-principals. In addition to this, teaching leaders can be on secondment from their school duties and employed as professional learning and development facilitators for schools. These teaching leaders differ from school leaders or principals who do not have teaching responsibilities.

### **Taking a Closer Look at Teacher Inquiry**

Teacher inquiry involves personal and professional motivations, expectations and conceptualisations of teaching and teacher learning. When teacher inquiry is construed as a form of teacher learning, teachers inquire to learn from their practice. Since teacher inquiry has been linked to historical student underperformance, there is an implicit expectation that teachers need to learn in order to change entrenched pedagogical practices that may not be meeting the needs of particular student populations. The Education Review Office (2012c) publicised this need and urgency in association to teacher inquiry by stating that teachers could use inquiry to “better meet the learning needs of all students, particularly priority

learners” (p. 2). Associating teacher inquiry with the needs of priority student draws attention to the equality agendas that undergird teacher inquiry.

Since its implementation, efforts to promote teacher inquiry have focused mainly on strategies to implement inquiry. There has been little attention to teachers’ experiences with inquiry. This is the gap that I am addressing in my study. When I began this study, I imagined that teachers were using the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle as a guide to the inquiry process (Timperley et al., 2007). This cycle positions student learning outcomes and needs as a means to inform teacher learning initiatives, making these initiatives strategically-designed to make an impact on student learning. While this strategic design sounded plausible and efficient to me, I wondered if its practical outcomes were as promising.

I chose to study these practical outcomes through an experiential perspective. Since an experiential focus elicits the lived experiences of teacher inquiry, these perspectives could buttress, challenge and enrich existing justifications for teacher inquiry. I used teacher voice as a construct to study teacher inquiry to reveal the subjective and first-hand experiences that teachers have had with inquiry. To do this, I constructed a central research question, “How can teacher inquiry be conceptualised from teachers’ experiences?” This main research question guided my thinking and actions throughout the study.

I conducted a narrative inquiry to gain an experiential view of teacher inquiry. These storied understandings augmented what I had read in policy documents and research literature. I quickly noticed that most teachers referred to the “teaching as inquiry” cycle as their inquiry guide rather than the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle. This drew my attention to the differences between policy rhetoric and reality, and it also piqued my interest in personal conceptualisations of teacher inquiry. I was puzzled as to why teachers were choosing to use the “teaching as inquiry” cycle instead of the teacher inquiry and knowledge-

building cycle, when the former was conceived as a teaching strategy and not as a form of teacher learning. This alerted me to my preconceived assumptions about the purpose of teacher inquiry. The various ways that teachers construed teacher inquiry in their stories opened my eyes to the messiness of conceptualising teacher inquiry formally and informally.

Although there were inherent similarities across teacher stories, each varied in focus, meaning and structure. Since storytelling is a natural way of communicating experience, teachers made personal sense of their experiences. They disclosed the meanings attached to their thoughts and actions, as well as the larger motivations that they had in relation to teaching and learning. Teacher inquiry carried personal and professional value, and these values revealed the professional lives of teachers. These stories inspired me to portray teacher inquiry differently. So I composed a sub-question, “What are teachers’ experiences with teacher inquiry?” to exhibit the richness, depth and nuances of their experiences.

I collected these stories through an unstructured-interview approach. This approach made it possible for teachers to explore their thoughts, opinions and conceptions more freely. It also created space for teachers to discuss personal conceptualisations of inquiry. For some teachers, personal or informal inquiries were habitual because inquiry was a teaching approach as well as a way to get to know their students. When these teachers described their informal inquiries, I noticed that their body language and voices were different. This led me to conjecture that informal inquiries may carry more weight and personal meaning. It made me question the limitations of narrative truths because their words did not seem to capture what I had intuited. I felt compelled to find an alternative way to examine their experiences.

By paying attention to the intricate details within teachers’ experiences, I wondered how I could analyse their views beyond stories. This prompted me to compose a second sub-question, “What insights into teacher inquiry can be gained from applying a deconstructive

lens on teachers' inquiry experience?" I used a deconstructive lens to depart from the interpretations that I gained through stories. These deconstructive explorations provided me with an opportunity to magnify distinct components in teachers' experiences without compromising the integrity of their stories. Since teacher inquiry might mean different things to different people, I used this opening to give prominence to other aspects of teacher inquiry such as situational, historical or contextual factors that affect how teachers inquire into their practices. This question allowed me to expand my conceptualisation of teacher inquiry.

### *Illuminating Different Aspects*

In this thesis, I bring together storied and deconstructive understandings of teacher inquiry to construct a montage of teacher inquiry. I believe that this composite representation is unconventional in the way that I have juxtaposed experiential insights with deconstructive theorisations about teacher inquiry. This unconventional approach permitted me to frame teacher inquiry in a different light, which could further how teacher inquiry is conceptualised. For this reason, I believe that my study will contribute to local and international discourse on teacher learning.

In New Zealand, my study extends what is known about teacher inquiry through policy documents and research literature. In national journal publications, authors pay closer attention to the personal value that teachers can derive from inquiry, and the outcomes that teachers can obtain from studying their practice (Bisley, 2015; Hill & Sewell, 2010). I discuss areas that venture beyond the scope of evaluative reports published by the Education Review Office (Education Review Office, 2011, 2012c) and case studies promoted through the Iterative Best Evidence Programme (Ministry of Education, 2016a; Timperley et al., 2007).

This thesis touches upon the complexity of teacher learning, the challenges of implementing teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning and the issues of using teacher learning as a

means to improve student learning. In my discussions, I give practical and theoretical suggestions that can help to ameliorate potential tensions, issues or challenges that arise from the process of inquiry. These suggestions give educational stakeholders such as policy makers, professional teaching agencies, educational researchers, school leaders, principals, teacher leaders, and teachers, valuable insight into how teachers make sense of their inquiries, how they may learn from this sense-making process and how teachers can be better supported within the inquiry process. This montage represents a particular contribution to knowledge on teacher learning that may not be evident through other methodological approaches.

### *Framing the Montage*

One of the aims within this study was to use teacher voice as a construct to understand teacher inquiry. To realise this aim, I departed from conducting a traditional literature review to establish the framework of my study. Instead, I have chosen to weave research literature around teacher stories and their deconstructions. This structure allowed teacher voice to flow seamlessly in their storied insights and deconstructions.

My ontological beliefs played a key role in preserving the narrative spirit of knowing and writing alive within this thesis. Please note that I use the terms “narrative” and “story” interchangeably because I understand a narrative to be a “short topical story about a particular event” (Chase, 2005, p. 652). In keeping with the narrative spirit, I present this thesis as a research narrative and have organised my research experiences into four interconnected stories that serve different purposes.

In this first narrative, I have outlined the boundaries of my study. I began by introducing the rationale and context of my study. These contextual features ground the issues that I will deliberate upon in subsequent stories. Here I stated my central research question and the two sub-questions that guided the direction of this study. I explained how these questions enabled



me to produce a montage of teacher inquiry that adds to existing knowledge on teacher inquiry and teacher learning.

Then, I moved onto a narrative about my methodological experiences. In this story, I talk about the narrative views and motivations that influenced the structure of this study. I explain why a narrative inquiry was suited for the purpose of this study. This story also contains detailed explanations of the decisions and processes that occurred during the recruitment, analysis, interpretation and writing phases of the study. These explanations provide details of the steps that I took to construct a methodological path that would enable me to tend to teachers' experiential insights in two ways, through reconstructed stories and deconstructive theorisations.

The third narrative is about insights. It contains eleven stories and deconstructed views of teacher inquiry. In the first two stories, I highlighted how teacher inquiry can be experienced as a postgraduate course while the remaining stories captured school-based inquiry experiences. Each story begins with a brief explanation of how I met each teacher, and is followed by their reconstructed teacher inquiry stories. After discussing their storied views, I explain how I identified links that ventured beyond their experiences. Since these links departed from their stories, I likened this analysis focus to using a deconstructive lens on their stories. Through this deconstructive process, I created my own pathways to conceptualise teacher inquiry and generated additional ways to study the teacher inquiry puzzle.

In the final narrative, I write about impressions that arose from the themes and notions that were discussed in prior sections. I used them to envision practical suggestions to the teacher inquiry process and structure. These recommendations can change the way that teachers are supported during inquiry and strengthen the teacher inquiry process in schools. I also used

this closing story to imagine future pathways that can extend research on teacher inquiry and teachers' professional learning experiences.

# **Part Two: Crafting Tools**

## **Unearthing the Roots of Inquiry**

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Delaying

Crafting

Reconstructing

Sharing

## **The Writing Experience**

Pushing Borders

Errant Narrative Threads

Deconstructive Explorations

## **Part Two: Crafting Tools**

In this methodological story, I address the fluidity, strengths and limitations of a narrative approach to research. The unbound structure of narrative knowing allows for creative, holistic, organic and evolving methodological approaches to studying people and their experiences. I regard my methodological story as an “authentic” representation of the “spiritual undertakings and reflections” (Jacobs, 2008, p. 1) that transpired during my study. I was inspired by Jacobs’s (2008) collection of authentic dissertations. The divergent voices he featured emboldened me to think about underscoring the “centrality of the researcher’s voice, experience, creativity and authority” over the research process (p. 1). It helped me to believe in the value of my voice.

I have learnt that methodology is a lived experience. I storied this methodological process to write realistically about my research experiences. In this story, I capture intricate details about the detours, unanticipated discoveries and challenges that I encountered. These twists and turns were part of the conscientious attempts that I made to uphold rigour, ethics, integrity and trustworthiness in my study. I wrote this methodological story in hopes that it can contribute to continuing methodological discourse that furthers narrative inquiry as a methodology.

I describe four major shifts that occurred. I begin with a search for a methodological home, review what it means to live the inquiry, explore the meaning within narratives and explain my writing experiences. In my search for a methodological home, I wrote with an anticipatory voice to retain the voice of a researcher looking forward to her study. I then feature excerpts from my reflective journal to highlight some of the challenges that I faced during the recruitment phase. This section was written in a more expressive tone to preserve some of the emotional and intellectual changes I experienced.

Even though I began my search for meaning in the narrative world, the lines between the process of analysis, interpretation and writing blurred when I entered the deconstructive realm. I wrote about the challenges of this process in an explanatory tone to justify some of the decisions and choices that I had to make. I clarify my reasons for going beyond narrative truths and explain how experimenting with narrative structure led me to postmodern and poststructuralist ideas. These ideas influenced me to apply a deconstructive lens and incited me to continue my exploration of teacher inquiry beyond stories.

### **Unearthing the Roots of Inquiry**

I started my doctoral studies with a fervent wish to understand teacher learning. For me, the equation could not be simpler; teachers learned so that they could change their practice. My first research proposal was about measuring teachers' propensity to change. I was ambitious with my plans to demystify the "black box of teacher learning" (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 7). I hypothesised that tracking how, when and why teachers changed their practice could contribute towards more effective professional learning initiatives. My rational and logical thoughts and assumptions about teachers, research and teacher learning were largely quantitative and positivistic. I felt confident that numbers could explain and represent teacher learning and change.

The more I read about teacher learning, the more disillusioned I became with my research proposal. Instead of moving forward with recruitment considerations, I started to question my intentions and interpretations of reality. I began to see how I was guided by a particular perception of teacher learning. By reading more widely, I noticed that my motivations had been shaped and limited by the "discourses" that I chose or had been exposed to (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). This made me pause to re-evaluate my own teacher learning experiences. I was most engaged when my desires, thoughts and motivations were aligned

with the way a course was structured and delivered. This made me think about a more collaborative approach to research.

I thought about how participative approaches could be beneficial to both teachers and researchers. Working alongside teachers would give me a more intimate perspective of how teachers learnt. Perhaps this could give me an insider view of the process of change and allow me to observe how teachers behaved when they learnt and changed. I continued to think of how I could study the conditions or triggers to change. Even though I was thinking about more collaborative approaches to study teacher learning, my positivistic motivations to study teachers continued to guide my thoughts.

I am uncertain of how, when or why a different inner voice emerged in this process. This voice challenged me to look beyond my conceptions of teacher learning. It provoked me to question the positivistic and rigid understandings that were influencing my thoughts. I started to become more cognisant and critical of my own positioning. This realisation forced me to confront my entrenched beliefs and values about professional learning. These internal tensions also pushed me towards the qualitative realm.

### **Searching For a Methodological Home**

In a bid to distance myself from my positivistic tendencies, I turned to qualitative research. This turn accentuated diverse humanistic and naturalistic approaches to conducting research. These methodological approaches spurred me to consider how people interact with each other. I spent time observing and listening to how people communicate. I realised that people were natural storytellers who constructed stories to give meaning to their lives and experiences. They tell stories to locate themselves in the world and to share these personal meanings with others.

I once read that stories were windows to the soul. Stories contain the “particulars of experience” that create meaning and understanding to living (Bruner, 1986, p. 13). Stories provide us with a structure to capture our self-constructed realities. In narrative research, these “*person or subjectivity-centered*” knowledge is brought to light (Bamberg, 2007, p. 2). My exploration of narrative research allowed me to imagine how I could make sense of teacher inquiry from an experiential and storied angle.

When people retell their experiences, they attempt to explain the “complexity of human action” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7). Stories could make visible how teachers positioned themselves in their inquiries. This “narrative mode” of knowing captures the landscapes of “action” and “consciousness” (Bruner, 1986, p. 14). It sheds light on the intentionality in teachers’ thoughts, decisions and actions. When people story their experiences, they share a “version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention” (Bruner, 1991, p. 4). Story is a subjective and purposeful form of communication that is an accepted interpretive tool that people use to share meaning, experiences and knowledge. To story reality is to highlight how intellectual, intentional and affective particularities of experiences are interwoven. According to Connelly and Clandinin,

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (cited in Clandinin (2006, pp. 45-46))

### *Narrative Inquiry*

My want to understand teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry played a strong role in my decision to choose narrative inquiry as my methodological approach. This storied approach could provide me with idiosyncratic, intimate and unique views of teachers' inquiry experiences. Chase (2011) described narrative inquiry as a "particular type" of qualitative inquiry that relies on storied accounts of reality (p. 421). Since narrative inquiry is an emergent methodology, there is a wide variation in how narratives or stories are defined, accumulated, analysed and presented. This fluidity is an inherent strength in qualitative research because research is presented as "part art, part science" (Charmaz, 2016, p. 47). It proposes that narrative research can be a creative and scientific process that is grounded in the stories that people choose to tell of their lives. These stories can illuminate the inner workings that people construct to capture reality.

Narrative inquiry is a humanistic approach to studying and understanding experience. As part of the qualitative family, it is an "interpretive, naturalistic approach" that values the "meanings" that people ascribe to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Since narrative inquiry is an interpretive method of understanding experience, I surmised that teacher stories would capture the idiosyncratic meanings that teachers assign to their inquiries.

Storied realities are at the heart of narrative inquiry. The knowledge and insights gained are evaluated for their rigour, verisimilitude and trustworthiness (Pinnegar & Daynes 2007).

These qualities allow narrative inquirers to employ diverse philosophies, methodologies and methods to exhibit their work. This flexibility influenced me to anchor myself in the voices of my teachers. These voices would remind me that research was a humanistic endeavour to make the world visible to others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). They would expose me to



the multiplicity inherent in narrated realities. These subjective realities expose particularities that may not conform to unitary or generalised understandings, which would give me room to justify my want to feature teacher voice in my research.

Since this was a departure from how I previously conceived research, I was aware that choosing a narrative approach would require a shift in thinking. I believe it was my determination to conduct a narrative inquiry that challenged me to learn how to be qualitative in my thoughts, actions and writing. It would be the kind of shift that necessitated a different kind of meta-awareness about myself and my place in the world. At the time, I could only imagine how this heightened sense of self-awareness would demand deep and critical reflexivity.

I found the narrative inquiries that Connelly and Clandinin (1990) conducted on teaching landscapes enlightening. Their narrative inquiry approach emphasised the importance of being collaborative with teachers in order to develop rich narratives. In their work, they found creative ways of centralising teachers as storytellers of their professional and personal lives. This helped me to recognise the social significance of studying teachers' storied accounts of experience. By featuring teacher voice, I was affirming how they were valuable, knowledgeable and legitimate sources of knowledge.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) propounded that "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them and write narratives of experience" (p. 2). In their work, they described how they spent a prolonged time at their research sites in order to produce rich, thick and deep accounts of experience. Since their work underscored the importance of building reciprocal relationships with teachers, it made me question how I would be able to create trustworthy accounts of experience as an outsider with limited time and access to teachers.

Even though I wanted my study to closely resemble Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) narrative inquiries, I quickly realised how my limited time and access would affect the kind of inquiry I would conduct. My narrative inquiry would lack the relational aspects that they strongly advocated for in their work (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). In their research, they were a part of the inquiry so they could write collaborative accounts of lived experiences with their participants. This is what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) meant by "experiencing an experience" (p. 50). Since they lived in the midst of their inquiries, they had a realistic appreciation of the landscape or situation they were studying. This appreciation enriched the descriptions of the phenomenon they were storying and added an experiential aspect to the research narratives they constructed. Since I had neither the time nor access to teachers that they had, I concluded that I had to find other means to connect with teachers. I decided that I would try to recruit teachers through email and paper advertisements that explained my research intentions. I then considered how best to create a relaxed, conversational approach to encourage teachers to talk about their experiences.

### *Interviewing*

When I decided to interview teachers for their stories, I read about the unstructured-interview approach. I deemed this approach to be more open and flexible than the other forms of interviewing. The unstructured approach suited my aim to put teachers at ease and to create a more natural or conversational flow to the interview. Charmaz (2016) recommended that interview stories be regarded as "emergent interactions" (p. 46). When stories emerge within an interview setting, these stories are dependent upon the climate of the interview. An egalitarian stance could make the interview a viable space for reflection and give the interviewer and interviewee opportunities to reflect collaboratively on their lives and realities.

I saw the unstructured approach as a way to offset the power differentials in the interview setting. It would give the interview a more conversational tone and place less emphasis on my view of teacher inquiry. This would redefine the “interviewee-interviewer relationship” (Chase, 2011, p. 423) and allow me to make the conversation more inviting. While the topic of our conversation would be predetermined, an unstructured approach would be a less rigid way to elicit insights. By relinquishing control of the interview structure, I hoped that it could mitigate my outsider status. This would give me a way to affirm to teachers that they were more knowledgeable about teacher inquiry than I was. I would use this to give teachers a clear message that I wanted to learn about teacher inquiry from their stories. An unstructured approach could give teachers ample space and opportunity to share their self-constructed sense of teacher inquiry.

Since I was unfamiliar with this way of interviewing, I conducted mock interviews with eleven people to give me the practice and confidence that I thought I would need. I designed an interview guide (Appendix A) based on Bauer and Gaskell’s (2000) work on narrative interviewing. They explicated how narrative interviewing goes “beyond the question-answer schema” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p. 61) commonly associated with research interviews. In my mock interviews, I practiced using their “narration schema” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p. 61) to see if it would help me to have natural conversations. These mock interviews gave me a taste of the variability that could occur within unstructured interviews. They also alerted me to the importance of establishing rapport and trust during interviews.

Establishing rapport is a crucial part of building the climate of trust and empathy within interviews. It signals an intention to “*understand*” in the “human-to-human relation” that occurs during interviews (Fine, 1994, p. 366). Rapport is the bond that people experience when they feel connected to one another. I wanted to build a strong rapport with teachers so that they could perceive my genuine interest and intent on listening to their stories. It was

important to me to demonstrate to teachers that I regarded them as people and not data sources. Thus, even though I was interested in “specific stories” (Chase, 2011, p. 423) because of my research focus, I decided that I would not discourage them from speaking about other things of their choosing. I reasoned that this flexibility would allow me to gain a broader perspective of their experience.

This broader perspective is important because people experience life through social, contextual and relational encounters. When people narrate their experiences, they will inevitably touch upon “social, cultural and institutional” factors in their milieu (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42). I imagined that teachers would be more prone to explore wider connections to their experience if they felt that they could trust me with their views. The lack of structure could induce teachers to discuss the “contextual influences” (Bold, 2012, p. 21) that affect their lives and give them the freedom to reflect openly on their experiences. It could encourage teachers to examine hidden or unexplored aspects of their experience (Kvale, 2007, p. 38). When people are encouraged to speak freely, they would be more likely to use “spontaneous language” that would highlight their “particular worldview” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, pp. 61-62). Perhaps this could give me a better understanding of teachers’ assumptions, philosophies and beliefs, which would help me to comprehend how they make sense of teacher inquiry and their experiences.

## **Living the Inquiry**

In the following section, I will use segments of my reflective journal to explain some of the obstacles, considerations and changes that occurred during the recruitment process. In these segments, I highlight some of the early thoughts that I had about teacher inquiry, which were constructed from policy documents and research literature. I discuss these thoughts to demonstrate the gradual thinking shifts that happened when I listened to stories about teacher inquiry.

I wrote in this journal on a daily basis to capture the ideas, moments and worries that were percolating in my mind throughout my study. Some may find it odd to see formal citations in these entries but I wrote in a formal tone because I regarded my daily reflections as part of the research process. This meticulous habit made it easier to place my thoughts into writing pieces and I considered it a good habit. I also used pseudonyms throughout my study to protect teachers' identities.

### *August – Recruiting*

I just got ethical approval to start my study (Appendix B). I should be happy but I feel all dressed up with nowhere to go. How do I get “real” primary school teachers? It does not matter that I was previously a primary school teacher; I am still an outsider to teachers in New Zealand. Enough self-pity! It is time to put those grandiose snowball-sampling ideas into motion. I am going to tap into every social network I can think of. All I need to do is convince one teacher (one snowball) and the rest (the avalanche of teachers) will follow! How hard can this be? An avalanche of willing teachers lining up at my doorstep! First step, print and post paper advertisements (Appendix C). Next step, email advertisements to as many contacts I can think of. Make a list of university lecturers, teacher unions and schools.

### *September – Making contact*

I just heard from my FIRST teacher! Joy and trepidation! This continuous dichotomy of emotions does not escape me. I must look through the flowchart I created (Appendix D). I must document every step and decision I make! I should use that email and phone guide so that I standardise my communication with teachers. Streamlining all communication is important so that no one is confused! There are a lot of words in my introductory email but I must explain all the terms I am using so that teachers understand my research (Appendix E). This is how all researchers do it, I think. It is part of the ethical procedure researchers follow in their research so I must just get through the first part and then we can talk like normal people.

I have growing doubts about my interview guide. I know I can do this without a guide but what if I forget and get tongue-tied? I do not need to memorise it but I do need to make sure that I cover everything about my research, their privacy and rights! I must remind myself to establish rapport as naturally as possible. Perhaps having the guide just makes me feel more prepared and research-like. I should explain how the unstructured approach works but I sure do hope that I do not bore them to death!

### First Interview - Lisa

I was so nervous but I am shocked that I tried to read to her out of my interview guide! Thank goodness, she did not walk out on me! I wanted to die of embarrassment when I started packing up before she did! I should be far more sensitive to body language. I cannot believe I was so thoughtless and rude!

I wonder if she fits my criteria of primary school teachers. She is a provisionally-registered teacher and does not teach full-time. I need to look this up.

Her stories were positive learning moments. I enjoyed our conversation. I let her talk and I felt comfortable listening to her stories instead of speaking. I am beginning to doubt that I will follow a collaborative approach in my narrative inquiry. I do not think I can create a shared understanding of teacher inquiry when I have not experienced the kind of inquiry she was talking about.

### Second Interview - Brian

I can bring the interview guide with me but I will NEVER read from it again! I cannot believe that I did not learn my lesson from Lisa. At least this time, I only read a couple of sentences before asking him if he read my email. He was definitely politely falling asleep! I can summarise my own research without reading and I can establish rapport without using that interview guide as a reminder. I just need to act like a normal human being!

He is a deputy principal on study leave. He shared his experiences in two voices; the voice of a school leader and a teacher. He teaches at the primary level but I wonder if he fits my criteria of primary school teachers. Maybe I need to have a more inclusive approach of primary school teachers in New Zealand.

He was very suspicious of my intentions to just listen and often checked to make sure he was “providing” me with relevant data or saying the “right” thing because he did not want to waste my time. Even at the end, he continued to ask what my “hidden” research agenda was. I wonder if he reacted the way he did because he has a different conception of research. In his research, he “collected data/interviewed” but he privileged his agenda and not his participants’ voices. I need to think deeply about how I can better assure and convince teachers that my listening is my agenda.

## Thoughts about September

My research question, “How have you experienced teacher inquiry as a form of professional learning and development?” appears to be a good prompt for stories. Going back to the first time teachers experienced teacher inquiry helps them to chronologically sequence their experiences.

The interview guide is superfluous during the interview because it takes my attention away from teachers. I think it is far more important to maintain eye-contact and use other body cues to show that I am listening attentively to them. Writing questions in my notebook is a better alternative.

Maybe it is too early to differentiate between the “teacher as inquiry” cycle and the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle. It is probably more conducive if I let teachers define what they mean by teacher inquiry even if they do not mention any particular cycle.

## *October – SOS calling all teachers*

I am getting desperate. It has been a couple of weeks since I last heard from anyone. Some people think that I should go through principals and others have said that teachers are more inclined to help when they see a real person. Should I start door-knocking and showing up at schools or maybe I should make an appointment with principals? This is going to be hard since they have not replied to any of my emails. Maybe I need to call some schools to make an appointment or to speak to the principal. Maybe I need to go through my personal contacts first but I need to start shamelessly promoting my research to everyone who gives me an opening to talk!



### Third Interview – Mary

I cannot believe that she showed up before I did. I was early but she was earlier! It unnerved me slightly that she was waiting for me instead of the other way around. This was probably why we started talking about something else other than my research in the first few minutes. Our small talk did not feel too forced even though we both knew that we were there to discuss my research.

I finally found someone who fits my initial definition of a primary school teacher. She is an experienced teacher taking post-graduate courses to further her skills and knowledge.

She is the second teacher to compare action research to teacher inquiry. I found it curious that she was quite critical of the mandated (and free) professional development that she had experienced through her school. She thinks she is learning more through her courses because she feels that she has more control.

### Fourth Interview - Tammy

I was extremely excited about my first New Zealand school visit! This excitement was dampened by her school principal's reaction to my research. His reaction made me feel more like an inquisitor than a researcher. I wonder why he thought it was important for her to share her professional development folder when she did not even mention it once during our lengthy conversation.

She has been teaching for many, many years. She thinks of teaching as a calling and relates it to her faith. I also wonder about the strong cultural and personal motivations to teach. She believes that she stayed on at the same school because of her cultural sense of responsibility to the local Samoan community.

Her teaching practice is strongly influenced by her cultural beliefs and values. She shared very intimate details about her life and helped me to see how teaching was personally and professionally fulfilling for her. Her accountability is to her community and it is more than just a professional responsibility.

### Thoughts about October

I hope Tammy follows through with her promise to find me some teachers to talk to. I am definitely struggling to find willing teachers! There is no need to limit myself to teachers who only teach full-time. I should keep an open mind and see who I get.

The feedback I received from my PhD Confirmation Presentation made me think about how I wanted to understand teachers' experiences. It was suggested that I seek "evidence" of teachers' inquiry as artifacts to inform my thinking. I wonder how teachers would feel if I asked for more than their time. I do not have a good feeling about it based on my experience with Tammy's principal. I am hesitant but I guess it does not hurt to ask. Perhaps teachers will be willing to share if it means something to them.

I met Lisa by accident this month. I was surprised at how stilted our conversation felt. When we met, I was deeply immersed in the transcription process so her voice and the rapport we had in the interview were alive in my head. In reality, we had lost this connection and were back to being strangers. This made me think about the purpose of conducting second interviews.

### *November – Running out of time!*

I need to think about how many teachers I really need. I have two more lined up for this month and they would make six. Perhaps eight would be a good number.

### Fifth Interview – Gemma

This was such a reflective conversation. We had more questions than answers but it was an enjoyable conversation about teacher inquiry. She exuded a lot of confidence in herself as a teacher, learner and an innately reflective person. I thought it was slightly unusual that she thought that all inquiry cycles were similar.

She took the same teacher inquiry course as Lisa. Her experience raises the same question for me about the feasibility of conducting teacher inquiry as a full-time teacher. Since she was a full-time student, she had more time to immerse herself in research literature but I do not think that full-time teachers will have the same amount of time.

The teacher inquiry course made a strong impression on her. She thinks that the learning and reflective stance she learnt is applicable to everything she does in life, not just teaching. It is interesting that she did not construe teacher inquiry to be similar to teachers' professional development initiatives.

### Sixth Interview – Anna and Cat

I was anxious about conducting a team interview. I did not know how the conversation would flow with three people. Anna and Cat put me at ease as soon as I walked into their classroom. The three-way conversation worked really well and I felt as if we were old acquaintances chatting about teacher inquiry experiences. They would often complete each other's thoughts but they were not shy about sharing differing opinions. Anna described this as an easy banter that they had established in their relationship.

Anna was the vice-principal and Special Needs Coordinator for the school. Cat was an experienced teacher. They have been working as a teaching team for many years and have stayed on at this school because of their relationship.

Their stories about teacher inquiry gave me an opening to ask for their professional development folder. I shared the suggestion that I had received from my PhD presentation and asked for their thoughts on the folder. They were candid about how little value it held for them. It confirmed my suspicions that evidence of teacher inquiry was more about demonstrating professional accountability and not really about teachers' learning experiences. Perhaps teacher inquiry had more meaning if it was personally motivated. This made me question how I defined teacher inquiry so I reflected on what teacher inquiry meant to me.

### What Teacher Inquiry Means to Me

When I think of teacher inquiry, I think back to the time that I was teaching nine-year-olds. I was puzzled with their low vocabulary scores despite my explicit efforts to use these words throughout the week. This want to increase their scores became my inquiry. I saw it as a challenge to change the way that I taught vocabulary.

I experimented with small group work because I believed that learning could be enhanced through social interaction. I promoted collaboration to increase group interaction, learning and discussion without any bearing on student achievement. Each member of the group had a clearly assigned role and responsibility. Once my students understood the routine, they loved it! It was an unconventional learning routine to them and it gave them the freedom to choose where they wanted to work. Some were on their hands and knees and they were spread across every corner of the classroom and hallway. Their enthusiasm for a less conventional approach to learning vocabulary was palpable.

There was no visible difference in vocabulary scores for the first week but I began seeing an upward trend in scores from the second or third week onwards. Although most students began to score closer to the 50% mark, I did not think that it was sufficient progress. I incorporated dramatization in hopes that this could deepen their understanding. This addition

was welcomed and I learnt that my students loved acting! They created elaborate props within the allotted time and invented ingenious ways of demonstrating the meaning of their words to their peers. Their hilarious sketches entertained the whole class. They grew more explorative and bold with their ideas as weeks passed. Their presentations bordered on drama productions and the focus on vocabulary words was lessened.

However, I was quite happy with their progress at the time because most of their scores hovered around 70%. To keep their interest up, I introduced the “Vocabulary Challenge” with different incentives to score 100% in their weekly vocabulary tests. This challenge forced me to pay extra attention to my low-performing students. I began to work specifically with this group of students and often paid one-on-one attention to them. My success with them fluctuated each week, but I continued to pay special attention to their vocabulary progress for the rest of the year.

### Thoughts about My Inquiry Story

I wrote this story to understand what I thought about teacher inquiry. It helped me to examine my own assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. As an international school teacher, I taught at different types of schools and across age levels. Perhaps my time with standardised testing and teaching high-school subjects had influenced my strong focus on learning achievement instead of the learning process. This was challenged when I conducted this inquiry because my low-performing students continued to show fluctuating progress despite my best efforts. I am glad that I wrote this out because it gave me a way to study my own thoughts. A part of me equated teacher inquiry to improving student achievement which explains why I was initially attracted to the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle. Perhaps I equated Timperley et al.’s (2007) definition of “student outcomes” to learning achievement (p. xlii). It had given me food for thought.

When I decided to research primary school teachers, I thought I would be examining teacher learning and teacher change through the teacher inquiry policy I had read about in the Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis. I imagined that teachers' inquiry stories would provide me with a lived perspective of how teachers were learning professionally in schools but so far, teachers seem to place more emphasis on other aspects of teacher inquiry. This is most certainly not what I had expected. It made me think about the incongruence between the stories that I had heard and my own inquiry experiences.

I was particularly eager to hear if teachers were using student needs and evidence of student learning to shape their professional learning initiatives. Reading policy documents and publications on teacher inquiry gave me the impression that there were teachers who were not meeting student needs. I anticipated that teacher inquiry was a feasible way to "fix" these "gaps" in teachers' practice (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 7). It seemed logical to me that teachers would need to improve their practice if they wanted to meet their students' needs.

I think that using student needs or learning achievement to guide the inquiry process could motivate teachers to change their teaching practices in the same way that my inquiry allowed me to experiment with new ways to teach vocabulary. It made sense to me that "evidence, impact, and achievement" would be central focuses in teachers' inquiry stories but this was not the case in the stories that I have heard. Perhaps I need to take my supervisor's advice and stop reading policy documents and research on teacher inquiry. I think I need to concentrate on the themes that are emerging from stories and keep an open mind. Too much reading might be detrimental!

### Seventh Interview – Maggie

I found it slightly difficult to read her body language even though she expressed a genuine interest in my research. She was quite open-minded and critical about her teacher inquiry experience. We had an easy rapport and I felt that this interview was quite collaborative in comparison to the other interviews that I have had so far.

She was a teaching assistant principal who was on secondment as a professional learning and development facilitator. Her current job is promoting teacher inquiry to teachers and school leaders in schools. The stories that she shared were recounted as a teaching school leader, teacher and teacher-learning facilitator.

The different voices (as a leader, teacher and facilitator) in her stories made me question how I defined teacher inquiry and teacher stories. Despite these three perspectives, I felt that she placed a strong emphasis on professional accountability. As a leader and facilitator, it was important to make teacher inquiry more accessible and realistic for teachers. This is when she stated that teacher inquiry is a beneficial form of teacher learning. She had strong feelings about the National Standards policy and it made me more curious about the connection between this policy and teacher inquiry.

### Eighth Interview – Winnie

Her organisation and confidence were clear from the outset. She even brought her laptop to show me her teacher inquiry documentation. She had a very clear image of teachers who inquired and how inquiry lives in their practice. She was very passionate about the benefits of teacher inquiry.

She was a teaching deputy-principal at her school. Winnie reminded me of Maggie because they were both on secondment and working as professional learning and development

facilitators promoting teacher inquiry to teachers and school leaders in schools. They shared their inquiry experiences via different voices; as a teacher, leader and facilitator.

She felt a strong need to differentiate between informal and formal teacher inquiries. To her, teachers inquired habitually to solve personal puzzles of practice while teachers inquire formally to show their professional accountability. This differentiation made me curious about the differences between the two, when really it was all about teacher learning and change. I assumed that teacher inquiry was an integrated personal and professional initiative. Her story made me think about how I defined teacher inquiry. Is it still teacher inquiry when you inquire informally?

### Thoughts about November

After recruiting provisionally-registered teachers in September, I am glad I kept an open mind towards recruitment. So far, I have teachers who are teaching school leaders, provisionally-registered teachers and practising teachers. This month, I encountered professional learning facilitators! These multiple perspectives enrich my understanding of teacher inquiry. I think I should aim for twelve teachers or just as many as I can get between now and the end of the school year.

When I started my research, I intended to explore how primary school teachers had experienced the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle as a form of professional learning and development (Timperley et al., 2007). I thought this was the cycle that was being used in schools but now I am beginning to realise that the “teaching as inquiry” cycle is more commonly used by teachers in schools. This situation was documented in the Education Review Office’s report on teacher inquiry (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 6). It is a good thing that I did not define teacher inquiry rigidly to teachers.



This month my research question changed from “How have teachers experienced teacher inquiry as a form of professional learning and development?” to “What are teachers’ experiences with teacher inquiry?” Removing the reference to professional learning and development allowed for a more realistic representation of the stories that I have gathered. Allowing teachers to conceptualise different definitions of teacher inquiry gives me a broader outlook on teacher inquiry.

I am beginning to question the term “professional learning and development” (Education Review Office, 2009b, p. 1). It seemed to be an ideal way to represent formal professional development and informal professional learning initiatives but now I question if this conflated term promoted by the Education Review Office (2009b) was an attempt to revamp informal teacher inquiries into evidence-driven teacher learning. It could be an attempt to normalise and promote their drive to use teacher learning as a method to improve student learning outcomes. These stories are making me more hesitant to accept that increasing student achievement should be the core purpose of education.

#### *December – Almost there*

I have three final interviews. I think eleven is a good number. I am not too worried because I feel as if their stories are starting to cover similar sentiments and areas. Although there are general similarities, each time I listen to a new teacher, they seem to bring out a different side of teacher inquiry.

#### Ninth Interview – Laurie

I really struggled to read her body language. When I asked if she felt dubious about formal teacher inquiry, I was slightly taken aback when she denied her frustration with it, which added to my confusion. From that moment on, I was far more guarded. I think this prevented me from developing an easy rapport with her. It was also my shortest interview.

She was a seasoned teacher who had once been a vice-principal. Teacher inquiry had just been introduced when she left to teach overseas. Upon her return, she was surprised at how integrated teacher inquiry had become.

She was the only teacher who felt a need to draw illustrations of the teacher inquiry cycles. The illustrations helped her articulate her thoughts more clearly. They also helped her differentiate between informal inquiries she conducts with students and formal inquiries she conducts as part of her professional responsibility.

#### Tenth Interview – Molly

There were many firsts in this interview. It was my first coffee shop interview. It was also the first time that a teacher brought her professional development folder as evidence and a copy of the Teachers' Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis for reference. We developed a quick rapport over her passion for teacher learning and teacher inquiry.

She was a teaching school leader who was transitioning into a teacher leadership post at a new school. She was open with her intention to use our conversation to organise her thoughts about how to implement teacher inquiry because this was her job in the next school year. Since she had experienced multiple implementations of teacher inquiry at different schools, reflecting on the benefits of each experience helped her clarify which model she preferred.

Her passion for formalising teacher inquiry was evident. She was proud of her professional development folder and the inquiries that she had collected over the years. To me, they resembled projects that she had completed. There was a strange lack of continuity though. At times, I wondered if she was describing them more as yearly projects than powerful learning

experiences. This tone made it sound like teacher inquiry was something teachers had to do to show that they were professionals.

#### Eleventh and Final Interview – Simon

Visiting a classroom at the end of a school year is a different experience. The walls were bare and furniture was stacked neatly in anticipation of tomorrow's Christmas party and farewell. He arranged to meet in his classroom so that he could show me his digital teacher inquiry documents. Even though he valued his teacher inquiries on students, I felt that he valued the reflective professional conversations he had with his colleagues more. I felt more comfortable asking probing questions with Simon because he was a personal acquaintance.

He was a provisionally-registered teacher who had just completed his first full-time year of teaching. Even though he did his practicum at the same school last year, teacher inquiry was only implemented this year.

His enthusiasm for teaching was evident in the way that he spoke about his inquiries into students and his personal growth as a teacher. His general impression of teacher inquiry made me consider how teacher learning occurs within the culture of a school.

#### Thoughts about December

I am glad that I went with a narrative approach to understand teacher inquiry. By remaining open-minded to teachers' conceptions of teacher inquiry, I was able to hear how they made sense of their experiences. Their stories have challenged me to reconsider my preconceived ideas about teacher inquiry. I think I am beginning to ask different questions. Their insights have provoked me to consider things that I had not known about teacher inquiry. Perhaps teacher inquiry is more than just a teacher learning policy. Schools are using it as a performance evaluation tool (Education Review Office, 2012c). It is also about satisfying

criteria for teacher registration (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2015) and part of how teachers report on student learning (Ministry of Education, 2009b). I think I need to consider how each story brings to the fore different elements of teacher inquiry.

### *Closing thoughts about My Reflective Journal*

Prior to the recruitment phase, I wrote in a descriptive and formal tone. It sounded as if I was willing myself to do many things in the interview process. I got over this once I remembered that I could hold conversations with complete strangers without the help of an interview guide. I remember the recruitment process being particularly challenging because I struggled to find teachers who were willing to speak about their experiences. It made me wonder if I had picked the wrong topic to approach teachers with or if my recruitment approaches were ineffective. After my experience with Tammy's principal, I think the reluctance to speak about teacher inquiry may be a signal of something bigger that I need to pay attention to.

My writing tone changed gradually in this part of my study. The more I worked with teachers' lives, inquiries and professional learning experiences the more I realised that I needed to clarify to myself where my thoughts were headed. Even though this study was about teachers' experiences, I was the one studying their stories. I have to remain reflexive to be aware of how I am influencing my understanding of teacher inquiry. This process of awareness showed in the way that I wrote to uproot my preconceived notions and assumptions.

In this new thinking space, my writing and words became slightly less guarded, more tentative, and questioning. This change in writing tone continued when I played with different ways to analyse and interpret stories. My reading and thoughts entered unfamiliar terrains and these uncertainties materialised in my writing. I describe these strange new places in greater detail in the following sections.

## **Exploring the Meaning within Narratives**

I began my search for meaning by transcribing interviews. When I began transcribing interviews, it was difficult for me not to analyse and interpret as I worked. I began with a verbatim approach to transcription. In addition to words, I painstakingly documented every filler word, sound or pause, word repetition and inaudible expression. This focus on detail felt like a dissection process. Even though there was value in paying such close attention to our conversations, I gradually realised that this fixation on content did not increase my understanding of teachers' experiences. Instead, it diluted the person behind the story. To counter this feeling, I constructed visual collages to summarise what I understood of teachers' experiences and to retain an impression of teachers. I also made elaborate mind maps to capture the narrative threads within conversations. I felt that these interpretive forms helped me to reconnect with the impression of teachers I had in my mind. I have included samples of these interpretive forms in Appendix F.

### *Delaying*

After completing the transcription process, I was extremely reluctant to send my transcriptions to teachers. Most transcriptions were at least seven single-spaced pages long. To me, they carried very little meaning because they were data or a textual representation of our conversations. I did not think that it was a meaningful way to demonstrate my appreciation for their time and goodwill (Nayar & Stanley, 2014, p. 31). I also felt that I could justify delaying contact with teachers because I had explained to them how it would probably take me a while to develop storied accounts of their experiences.

Delaying contact also made me consider how important transcription accuracy was in my search for meaning. Carlson (2010) called this questioning the importance of "rapport" against the "accuracy and thoroughness" of data (p. 1112). Her insights helped me understand

how I, as an emergent researcher, had misinterpreted accuracy as a sense of thoroughness. When researchers involve their participants in the member-checking process, it elevates the trustworthiness of their work. Member checking demonstrates how researchers are “ethically and mindfully” aware of how their work may affect others (Carlson, 2010, p. 1103). This ethical mindset is a hallmark of the humanistic motivation for qualitative research. In a conversation with Clandinin and Murphy (2007), Amia Lieblich envisioned this mindset as an “ongoing ethical relationship” with participants (p. 650). To her, this negotiated relationship is part of being respectful to participants for their time and insights.

I was acutely aware of how my limited contact with teachers differed from the ongoing and collaborative relationships Clandinin and Connelly (2000) had portrayed in their narrative inquiry research. Even though I agreed with their thoughts on developing a continued relationship with participants, I hesitated because I did not want to contact my teachers unnecessarily. I sensed that our interview had already been an imposition on their time. I began to consider if the second interview that I had requested from my teachers was necessary. How could I justify asking for more time when I had not worked through what they had already shared with me? I concluded I would contact my teachers when I had a better vision of how I was going to present and interpret their experiences.

### *Crafting*

I thought about how this microscopic focus on details was a more “paradigmatic” approach to analysing narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). Polkinghorne (1995) used Bruner’s (1986) work on thinking modes to explain how narrative analysis can be conducted with paradigmatic or narrative intentions. To Polkinghorne (1995), a paradigmatic outlook focuses on creating abstract classifications of experience. The motivation for this type of narrative analysis would be to “develop general knowledge about a collection of stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15).

In comparison, a “narrative” way of analysing stories applies “narrative reasoning” skills in order to construct meaning within stories (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 21). He elucidated how a “narrative” outlook focused on developing coherency within “storied accounts” of experience (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 21). Developing a “plot” in stories creates “systemic unity” within narrated experience (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 18). Constructing narratives around this central storyline helps to accentuate the meaning that people assign to experiences. This focus on narrative plot reminded me of Riessman’s (2008) cogent call for narratives to be analysed through a “case centered” mindset (p. 74). She cautioned against presenting stories as snippets of contextually displaced insights. Instead, she recommended a more holistic approach towards analysing narratives. When stories are contextualised, they frame narrative knowing as a situated, particular and subjective interpretation of lived experiences. These ideas on how to analyse narratives inspired me to explore how I could develop my own understanding of teachers’ experiences.

I thought about how I could balance “meaning and social significance” to create special insights that other methodological approaches do not offer (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). I considered how I could craft stories that would demonstrate the verisimilitude and believability of storied experiences. I began experimenting with the idea of creating simple, complicated and complex stories from teachers’ experiences.

I imagined simple stories as core stories about teachers’ inquiry experiences. These stories essentially captured the practical aspects of conducting teacher inquiry. During the crafting of these stories, I had to ignore the other details that teachers had shared during our conversation. Since I stripped their experiences down to bare essentials, I felt as if I was mining their experiences to only feature pertinent teacher inquiry parts. I noted how I began to think and treat teacher inquiry as a phenomenon. This made me stop to consider if this

phenomenological understanding of teachers' experiences was the meaning that I was looking for in my work.

After deciding that these simple stories were inadequate, I paid closer attention to how teachers shaped our conversation and noticed how they added details to these experiences. These details gave their accounts more depth, reasoning and motivation. I called these the complicated details that enriched teachers' practical inquiry experiences. Crafting these complicated stories provided me with a greater appreciation for how teachers used story to communicate meaning.

After constructing these complicated stories, I was left with distinctive aspects of teachers' lives, knowledge and experience that they had tied to teacher inquiry. It bothered me that these distinct aspects were not featured in their stories because they were personal characteristics that described teachers as unique individuals. Weaving these into stories generated a complex representation of teachers' inquiry experiences. At the time, I wondered if this layered approach was my interpretation of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) metaphorical "three-dimensional inquiry space" (p. 89). In their work, they used this space to frame "interaction", "continuity" and "situation" as inherent elements within experience (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). These angles come together to capture the complexity of using stories to make meaning of experience. Even though my layered approach differed from their metaphorical space, we both developed these approaches in order to better understand storied accounts of experience.

In this layered approach, I focused on teachers' core inquiry experiences. Each storied layer contextualised their experiences further. In this search for meaning, I created stories that were predominantly in teachers' original voices because I wanted my impression of teachers to be present in the stories that I crafted. These impressions were interpretive and not



representative of the “real” teachers I had spoken to. When I met Lisa two months after I interviewed her, I felt that the rapport that I had developed with her was gone. While I lived with her voice in my head, she had continued with her life. This encounter gave me a stronger appreciation for the fragility and ephemeral qualities that are captured within stories.

Essentially, the stories I crafted would be possibilities and not static representations of teachers’ experiences. This made me think of how to justify my want to feature teacher voice.

Choosing to work in teachers’ voices enabled me to better preserve the “identity work” they had constructed during our conversation (Chase, 2005, p. 659). In her work, Chase (2005) highlighted the importance of being unequivocal with voice in narrative research (p. 652).

When working with narratives, researchers have to carefully consider whose voice is privileged because using stories to represent experience carries strong ethical implications.

Researchers who use narratives to examine how people make sense of experience must be cognisant of how they present meaning on behalf of their participants (Chase, 2011, p. 424).

When people story their lives, they offer ways for their audience to make emotional and cognitive connections to their lives.

Since this invitational quality is inherent within stories, I treated teachers’ experiences as vicarious opportunities to experience teacher inquiry through their eyes. By listening to their stories, I could imagine how they experienced inquiry, which also made me more aware of how I would like my story of experience to be told by others. To me, crafting stories in teachers’ voices gave their stories a stronger sense of presence. I decided that it gave my stories a stronger “speaking to” rather than a “speaking for” tone (Alcoff, 1992, p. 23). Alcoff (1992) described how a speaking “with and for” attitude to research helps to mitigate issues of misinterpretation and misrepresentation that comes from exerting “authority and privilege” over others (p. 23). I rationalised that I would reduce the likelihood of these issues occurring the more I used teacher voice to show meaning.

Using teacher voice also demonstrates my want to position teachers as knowledgeable and valued meaning-makers of teacher inquiry. It represented my version of an insider view of teacher inquiry. I considered how my work could be critiqued as a “desire to let field texts speak for themselves” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 130). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described field texts as interim forms of understanding. They used field texts as a co-constructive space to make meaning with their participants. Since I had limited contact with teachers, my stories were dissimilar from field texts. My crafted stories were closer to an interpretive account of teachers’ experiences.

Playing with storied expressions of experience gave me space to feature subtleties that made their experiences unique. In order to make these stories more coherent and readable, I had to make some minor aesthetic decisions. For example, I made small alterations to sentence structures such as extending contractions, changing tenses and rewording some words or expressions. I also used pseudonyms to remove identifying elements such as names of places and people to protect the identities of teachers.

After approximately six months, I completed simple, complicated and complex stories for three teachers. I emailed these stories, visual interpretive forms and interview transcriptions to teachers to get their feedback. I decided to include the visual collages and mind maps that I had developed to demonstrate how I had experimented with different ways to make sense of their experiences. In my email, I invited them to comment on these interpretations and stories. I received short but positive and encouraging responses from all three of them. Perhaps this was not what they were expecting from a storied approach to research. It was certainly not what I had imagined it to be either.

Before I continued onto my fourth teacher, I stepped back from this process to consider the perspectives that I had gained from these crafted stories. Since it took me approximately a

month to compose a story, I began worrying that I may have taken the crafting process too far. Did these crafted stories adequately capture the perspectives of teachers or had I crafted them to show meaning? These questions helped me to remain mindful of my research directions and motivations. Perhaps they also prompted me to experiment with another way to develop teachers' storied meanings.

### *Reconstructing*

When I stopped crafting stories, I returned to the focus of my study, which was to conceptualise teacher inquiry through teachers' experiences. I compared the interpretations that I had created through visual collages, mind maps and crafted stories, and concluded that there were limitless possibilities within teachers' initial reflections. This helped me to decide not to conduct second interviews with teachers. I decided to find a way to highlight the rawness of their accounts because this captured their unedited feelings, opinions and impressions. These accounts could show the mutability of narrating reality and illuminate how people located themselves in reality.

When people share their experiences, they naturally create identities to position themselves within their narrated realities. As such, when researchers study "narrative *as* lived experience", they pay attention to the "*how*" and "*what*" aspects in stories (Chase, 2011, p. 422, emphasis in original). This focus highlights how people use stories to create "meaningful selves, identities and realities" (Chase, 2011, p. 422). Stories can provide glimpses of how people create identities to communicate meaning. With a focus on identity work, I also began to realise that my interpretations were based on my impression of teachers. Basically, I constructed an interpretation of the ephemeral identities teachers had constructed during interviews. I construed these identities to be ephemeral because they were constructed in a temporal and relational space. I thought about the way that these ephemeral identities

were interwoven into how teachers explored and recounted their experiences. I kept these identities in mind to help me to develop a stronger sense of the person within the experience.

When I decided to stop crafting teachers' experiences into simple, complicated and complex stories, I started to notice how teachers storied their experiences in chunks. These chunks reminded me of how Chase (2005) had defined narrative as a "short topical story about a particular event" (p. 652). It then became more apparent to me that these chunks were short stories. When I crafted stories, I had to reconstruct experiences to create meaning but this time, I could focus on interpreting the meaning that was already attached to these short stories.

Since these stories were discernible chunks within our conversation, it was less time-consuming to reconstruct them into stories. These stories illuminated how teachers made sense of their inquiries and framed teachers' personal and professional rationales for conducting inquiry differently. Since this reconstructive method allowed me to emphasise the main ideas that teachers wanted to convey about teacher inquiry, I decided that it would suit my intention to make their voices and insights focal points in their stories.

### *Sharing*

This less laborious approach meant that I was able to reconstruct eleven teacher stories within six months. I emailed these stories to teachers a year after I had spoken to them. In addition to these stories, I also sent the remaining eight teachers their interview transcriptions. When I emailed teachers, I had a clearer vision of what I wanted to do with their stories. Albeit late, I contacted teachers to check if they would be comfortable with the views that I had woven together to create a coherent story. In my email, I explained how and why I constructed their stories into short teacher inquiry stories. I emphasised that these stories were mainly in their original voices because I wanted to present a believable portrayal of their experience.

My second member-checking experience provided me with a better appreciation for the “ethical” considerations within qualitative research (Ely, 1991, p. 218). Even though this sharing was delayed, it gave me the opportunity to show teachers how I had storied their experiences into research text. One teacher responded to my email encouragingly. She apologised for speaking so much during the interview and her self-deprecating tone reminded me of why I wanted to focus on understanding teacher inquiry through teacher stories. It reminded me of the importance of privileging teacher voice because these voices captured first-hand accounts of people who experienced teacher inquiry. The more I worked with their stories, the more I understood the implications of using teacher voice to understand teacher inquiry. I had to tread carefully because I did not want to be overly critical of these views.

### **The Writing Experience**

In the early days of my study, I wrote to record and describe my thoughts and actions. Looking back, these resembled the observation notes my students used to make during science experiments. As I played with crafting and constructing stories, my writing became less formal and filled with more exploratory thoughts. When I allowed myself to write intuitively, it became a place to decipher my thoughts. In this intuitive space, I wrote more often because it became a way to “talk” to myself. Perhaps this form of writing helped me to develop more confidence in my abilities to analyse and interpret meaning from stories. When I wrote about my experiences, I felt the “authority” and responsibility I had in making sense of my study (Richardson, 2001, p. 35). This self-talk offered me a deeper understanding of my “research topic” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 959). Writing intuitively encouraged me to think freely about my work.

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) helped me to recognise how “*thought happened in the writing*” and how writing can extend thinking (p. 970). Their work on writing compelled me

to consider how I could use writing beyond descriptive intentions. They inspired me to write and think differently about the puzzles that were percolating in my mind. This shift had a profound impact on the way that I thought about my work, which influenced me to write in order to understand. When I wrote to understand, writing served as a mirror that reflected my inner struggles. It captured how searching for meaning was about mentally shifting the ground that my thoughts were rooted in. I learnt to recognise how my subjectivities influenced the meanings that I had derived and assigned to my work. This meta-awareness helped me to break down the internal boundaries in my thinking.

I thought about how Eisner (1988) eloquently described research as “value-laden” endeavours that are influenced but limited by people’s “technologies of mind” (p. 19). This made me consider how “method influences how we think and what we are permitted to feel” in the way that they “limit, as well as illuminate” experiences (p. 19). These thoughts encouraged me to explore how writing to understand could deepen my view of teacher inquiry. I began to treat writing as a method to capture the process of “becoming” rather than being (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 966).

Allowing myself to write intuitively gave me the opportunity to be mentally and emotionally cathartic. Through writing, I went on mental expeditions and encountered different parts of myself. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) posited that writing about the self could “evoke deeper parts of the self, heal wounds, enhance the sense of self – or even alter one’s sense of identity” (p. 965). I believe that writing helped me to experience some of these processes. I think I uncovered hidden or latent parts of myself when I wrote intuitively but this was not a pleasant experience. If anything, discovering these parts of my psyche was an agonising and disconcerting experience. Some days, I did not recognise the “me” that had materialised on paper even though the words had flowed out from my thoughts. I can only conjecture that

writing intuitively freed my mind to explore unfamiliar places. By allowing my intuition to guide my thoughts and writing, I felt as if I had invoked a different part of me.

I think of this intuitive part of me as the “Wild Woman” that resides within (Estes, 1993). She is a metaphorical representation of the creative spirit that lives in our psyche. She was the voice of empathy that coaxed me to explore, question and resist settling. When I wrote intuitively, the spirit of my “Wild Woman” blossomed. She compelled me to comprehend the world through the “eyes of intuition which is many-eyed” (Estes, 1993, p. 12). Her relentless voice urged me to dig deeper for meaning. She thrives in creative endeavours because she “resides in the guts, not in the head” (Estes, 1993, p. 13). Her presence challenged my reliance on the rational and logical voices in my head. Writing intuitively taught me to rely more on my “gut” feelings.

I used my imagination to sense the larger connections in my work. This was a departure from my previous attempts to make meaning of teachers’ experiences. However, this intuitive attitude did not mean that I adopted a “freewheeling” attitude towards my work but rather it materialised as a receptiveness to new ideas (Saldaña, 2011, p. 66). Writing became a mental flowerbed to grow ideas. When I wrote, I scattered seeds or ideas. Some of these seeds of thoughts germinated while others did not. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), these “false starts and dead ends” are plentiful when trying to make sense and shape narratives into research texts (p. 121). Since shaping narratives is a creative process, they encouraged narrative researchers to seek inspiration from others. I read about how arts-informed narrative researchers such as Cole and Knowles (2008) adopt “a more natural process of engagement” and use “commonsense decision making, intuition, and a general responsiveness to the natural flow of events and experiences” to make sense of reality (p. 61). They envisioned narrative knowing as an intuitive, creative and artistic process. Their ideas encouraged me to

view writing as an art-making process that needed nurturing. Perhaps I had nurtured my creative side when I allowed myself to write intuitively.

In hindsight, I can compare this intuitive writing process to learning how to make pottery on the wheel. When I started, I often found it difficult to centre the ball of clay. The more I tried to control my hands, the more I tensed and the more off-centre my ball of clay became. This analogy pertinently highlights how I initially approached my study from logical and rational angles. These angles promoted a more paradigmatic approach to understanding teacher stories. Even though these were valuable insights, on a deeper level, I sought a different kind of understanding. When I learnt how to feel and judge if my clay was centred on the wheel, I also learnt to trust in my instinctive ability to pull the walls of clay up. I gradually allowed my clay to become bowls, jugs, mugs or somewhat cylindrical containers and not what I initially intended them to become.

Reflecting on my writing experience as an art-making process highlights the struggles that I faced in writing to understand. This learning experience was about letting go and developing more confidence and trust in my instincts. These were internal shifts that needed to occur in my thinking to move beyond preconceived notions about teacher inquiry and methodology.

### *Pushing Borders*

One of the biggest influences on my writing and thinking was Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) chapter on writing as a "method of inquiry". The way they portrayed writing as a method to create knowledge gave me the confidence that I could write to understand.

Richardson's (2001) work on personal stories in research inspired me to search for unknown "plot-lines" in how I read the world (p. 37). She affirmed that writing could be used to explore and expand personal constructions of reality. Using writing as a "method of data analysis" was akin to using "writing to think" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970). She



described this as “rhizomatic work” that enabled writers to make “accidental and fortuitous connections” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970). Through these insights, I forced myself to look for new meanings in my work. It made me look anew at what I thought I had understood about my work.

Reading Richardson and St. Pierre’s (2005) work on writing also made me more receptive to postmodern and poststructuralist ideas. They explained how postmodernism legitimises “partial, local and historical knowledge” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). For them, poststructuralism, a “particular kind of postmodernist thinking”, highlights how language “produces meaning and creates social reality” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). These philosophical movements enabled researchers to critique as well as celebrate the subjectivity of knowing and of using language to represent reality.

Poststructuralism highlights how knowledge is limited. It is a movement that critiques generalised truth claims. This philosophical movement resists “*single, final and universally communicable meanings*” (Williams, 2005, p. 14). It challenges “settled forms of knowledge” by drawing attention to the limits within these forms of knowing (Williams, 2005, p. 2). This view emphasises that knowledge is “made by its limits and cannot be defined independently of them” (Williams, 2005, p. 2). Poststructuralism promotes the notion of disruption. Even though disruption has negative connotations, it also represents the act of interruption. I think that writing intuitively was the interruption I needed to alert me to the assumptions that I was making in my work. Since I am limited by my own assumptions, it made me question the kind of knowledge I was endorsing. These questions arose when I monitored my thought processes and I saw them as opportunities to challenge myself to think differently. I wanted to find a way to stretch beyond the internal voices that were influencing my thinking.

Richardson's (2001) work on writing and knowledge production challenged me to confront the social, ethical and agentic implications of my study. It reminded me of one of the reasons I chose to inquire through narratives. I wanted to engage in work that could push the boundaries of educational research. Narrative inquiries use subjective meaning to highlight the "social significance" of experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). It promotes experience as a legitimate way to make sense of lived realities. This reminded me that I was studying teachers' experiences because I valued their insights into teacher inquiry. These subjective views could depict how teachers conducted, understood and reflected on their professional learning experiences. They could allow me to celebrate the partiality and unique aspects of teacher inquiry. This made me consider what partiality meant in my search for social significance.

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) appropriately questioned if "representation is possible" in interpretive research (p. 971). In interpretive research, claims to knowledge are made as bounded ways of understanding. These claims are limited by the ways that we construct knowing. This is where limitation can be envisioned as an unrestrained exploration to create different ways of knowing and constructing knowledge. I thought of how I could understand and present teachers' experiences unconventionally. I began writing to explore different angles within their stories and noticed that I could write to experiment with narrative form.

I became more attentive to the choices that I made in my study. I considered how these choices could perpetuate or disrupt existing discourse on teacher inquiry. I was more attuned to the "angle of repose" I adopted when I constructed meaning (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) used the concept of "repose" to emphasise how researchers have multiple and varied lenses in which to understand reality (p. 963). Each angle of repose offers different understandings. When consolidated, this "crystallization" creates a "deepened, complex and thoroughly partial understanding" of reality (Richardson &

St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). This concept of crystallisation inspired me to think of how I could use the unique themes within teacher stories to create a more profound understanding of teacher inquiry.

### *Errant Narrative Threads*

When I reconstructed teacher stories, I was left with narrative threads that did not fit the flow of their stories. I did not know if these threads were even relevant to my understanding of teacher inquiry. I called them errant narrative threads because they deviated from teachers' inquiry stories, appeared to be unrelated to teacher inquiry or were personal stories about teachers' lives. The unstructured interview approach I used to create a relaxed and open context for teachers to explore their experiences had produced these details. My unscripted approach to interviewing had encouraged teachers to shape their retelling process. It allowed teachers to share unanticipated or divergent aspects of their experience. These errant narrative threads exposed less obvious connections between teachers' inquiry experiences and their professional lives.

I thought about the possibility that teachers would use these narrative threads to emphasise “particular and special characteristics” about their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11). I entertained the idea that these errant threads had been incorporated to foreground the richness and depth of their “storied memories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11). To sense these less apparent connections, I had to rely on my imagination. I used my imagination to picture how these diverse elements, contexts, feelings and intentions were meaningful to their inquiries. I applied what Denzin (2007) described as “emotional understanding” by considering how teachers may have felt during their inquiry experiences and how they may have felt about these ideas during our conversation. This “subjective interpretation of another’s emotional experience from one’s own standpoint” (Denzin, 2007, p. 137) helped me to reframe our

conversation and my interpretation of teachers' ephemeral identities differently. This emotional focus caused me to experience a different state of mindfulness. It made me more attuned to what Bruner (1986) described as using stories to change "intuition into expressions" (p. 15). Instead of placing too much weight on the literal meanings within words, I learnt to sense the meaning and larger connections teachers were trying to make in our conversation.

Since narrated realities are subjective constructions of reality, narrative researchers have argued that "*any* narrative" can be used "as an *instance*" to illuminate the messiness and complexity of life (Chase, 2005, p. 667). Not only do narratives offer insight into the identity work of narrators, they bring to the fore the conditions that influence narrators' realities. I began thinking of these errant threads as "social artifacts" (Riessman, 2008, p. 105) that foregrounded social, contextual, historical and cultural implications of teacher inquiry. They stretched my awareness of teachers' experiences by highlighting the messy landscape of teachers' realities. These narrated "truths" are meaningful and useful insights that make the world more visible (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 479). Polkinghorne (2007) asserted that stories are the "best evidence available to researchers about the realm of people's experience" (p. 479). When people describe their experiences, they provide intimate details about how they construct reality.

These errant narrative threads were fascinating because they were personal and professional connections to teachers' lives. I explored how these connections situated teacher inquiry within larger contexts that extended beyond teachers' experiences. In this way, I began to see how these errant threads touched upon complexity of teaching, professional learning and teachers' roles in education. Some of these connections reminded me of the issues that lived in Schön's (1991) metaphorical lowlands. He portrayed these as "ill-formed, vague and

messy” issues that eluded technical rationality (Schön, 1995, p. 28). These errant narrative threads generated new insights into teacher inquiry.

### *Deconstructive Explorations*

In my search for meaning, I focused on privileging teacher voice in their stories. I believed that I could achieve this by featuring their stories and using their storied perceptions to study the teacher inquiry puzzle. I wanted to showcase teacher voice as legitimate knowledge even though their voices are often less heard in educational policies. This want challenged me to think of different ways to uncover the subtle aspects of their experience with teacher inquiry.

I used an empathetic and supportive interpretive voice to discuss their particular beliefs, values and opinions. So far, I had relied on stories to develop my understanding of teacher inquiry. The interpretive work I completed to this point could answer my research question, “What are teachers’ experiences with teacher inquiry?” The interpretive insights I featured along with teacher stories were useful contributions to the existing knowledge base about teacher inquiry.

In narrative inquiries, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called for researchers to justify how their inquiries had a “public, social sense of significance” (p. 121). This justification brings forth the social significance of studying narrated realities. It establishes why storied insights provide valuable knowledge about people’s lived realities and how narrative insights can enrich what is known. Even though my understanding of narrative inquiry was based largely on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), my study was fundamentally different from the collaborative and lived inquiry experiences they advocated for. Since I had limited contact with teachers, my work does not feature the benefits of co-constructed narratives of experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). To highlight the social significance of my teacher stories, I thought about writing their experiences differently.

I brought together teacher stories and their errant narrative threads. I revisited their experiences to scrutinise what teachers were saying and not saying. This materialised as a process of “making the familiar strange and making the strange familiar” (Eisner, 2008, p. 11). It meant that I did not restrict my thinking to the insights that I had gained from teachers’ reconstructed stories. In this revisit, I also considered the implications of relying on language to understand. I thought about what Riessman (2008) had highlighted through Bakhtin’s work on novels. She stated that language is “saturated with ideology and meanings from previous usage” (p. 107). This provoked me to apply a more intuitive approach to understanding teachers’ experiences, which also helped me to read between the lines. I learnt to “notice and understand what is not literally there” (Eisner, 2008, p. 11). I played with these ideas in my intuitive writing because this space enabled me to imagine connections that were imperceptible through words. This process of exploration opened new thinking doors and ushered in unanticipated visitors.

I played with some of the words, themes and impressions in teachers’ experiences to see if they could be used as lenses to understand teacher inquiry. These lenses moved my focus away from the views that I had gained through stories. They allowed me to depart from what I interpreted as the “‘essential’ message” (Rorty, 1995, p. 171) teachers wanted to convey about their experiences. These lenses acted as deconstructive ways to understand teacher inquiry through teachers’ experiences. Since these views diverged from the meaning that teachers attached to them in their stories, I believe they could be construed as deconstructive explorations.

Deconstruction occurs when “accidental features” within text are seen as “betraying, subverting” the main theme in text (Rorty, 1995, p. 171). I deconstructed because I wanted to pursue divergent elements within their experience. These pursuits opened up new angles that illuminated deeper issues associated with teacher inquiry. I turned these deconstructive

explorations into a different question about teacher inquiry, “What insights into teacher inquiry can be gained from applying a deconstructive lens on teachers’ inquiry experience?”

When I began my deconstructions, I harboured fears that these deconstructive views would diminish the value that I had fought so hard to retain in teacher stories. With time, I came to value the way that these explorations acquainted me with unusual ways to frame the teacher inquiry puzzle. They enabled me to construct multi-vocal arguments that brought together stories, research literature and philosophy. These deconstructions pushed me towards the realm of “post theories” where I could choose to “be-do-live” the methodological experience differently (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 5). In this space, I had the “freedom” to play, extend or resist established patterns of thinking (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 5). I think this sense of freedom may have caused me to feel more empowered and agentic in my writing.

I associate this sense of empowerment with the idea that power exists through resistance (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). When power is defined in relation to resistance, it suggests that both are negotiated and fluid states of being. This allows power and resistance to be imagined through a “constraining and liberating” relationship and it also hints that “power and resistance together *define* agency” (Zembylas, 2005, p. 938, emphasis in original). I used these philosophical notions to imagine power, resistance and agency as interlinked states of being. This allowed me to imagine my writing as a means to resist established ways of knowing and understanding reality.

I began to see my writing as a form of agency that might allow me to challenge what is known in unorthodox ways. I followed in the footsteps of others who have taken personal narratives to inquiry spaces (Leavy, 2016; Tamas, 2016), questioned academic knowing through writing (Richardson, 2000) and used storytelling to recognise the self within (Estes, 1993). I also am inspired by the work of Neilson, Gabriel, Arroz, and Mendonça (2014) who

wrote about disrupting dominant ways of presenting and constructing knowledge. In their work with fishermen, they wrote to celebrate the lives and tacit knowledge of fishermen who made their livelihoods and realities out of “living with the sea” (Neilson et al., 2014, p. 4). Even though we do not share a similar area of study, I felt connected to their views because we strived to make less-privileged voices heard. We had a shared understanding that fishermen and teachers held their own valuable ways of knowing. Writing to make these voices more prominent brings awareness to the lived effects of policies.

In this thesis, I threaded these deconstructive explorations alongside teacher stories to produce a composite understanding of teacher inquiry. When these are juxtaposed, they shed light on the intricacies of teacher inquiry, teacher learning and the professional lives of teachers. This composite approach allowed me to assemble, magnify and discuss diverse elements within the teacher inquiry puzzle that may not be illuminated through other methodological approaches.



# **Part Three: Constructing Vivid Images**

## **Postgraduate Experiences**

Lisa – Learning Moments

Gemma – Reflective Intentions

Tammy – Cultural Accountability

Laurie – Conceptualising Inquiry

Winnie – Motivation

Brian – Emotions

Maggie - Tensions

Anna and Cat – Collaboration

Mary – Identities

Molly – Critical Thinking

Simon – Purposeful Inquiry

### **Part Three: Constructing Vivid Images**

The image of a montage comes to mind when I think of how my work comes together to present a composite understanding of teacher inquiry in New Zealand. I think of a montage as an image that is made by combining or juxtaposing different things. In my montage, I juxtaposed teachers' reconstructed stories with deconstructed explorations of their experience. This juxtaposition enabled me to capture the complex nature of teacher inquiry.

Each story contains distinctive aspects of the teacher inquiry puzzle. These stories begin with a brief account of how I met teachers. Then, I feature teachers' reconstructed stories as indented and italicised paragraphs. My interpretive thoughts punctuate each paragraph of their story to provide additional background, clarification or support to their ideas. After this, I explain how and why I used particular words, themes or impressions to look beyond their experiences. These acted as deconstructive lenses that allowed me to extend my understanding of teacher inquiry. These explorations produced deconstructive theorisations that illuminated alternative ways to portray the teacher inquiry puzzle.

#### **Postgraduate Experiences**

This part of the story contains Lisa's and Gemma's teacher inquiry experiences. I decided to premise their stories into together because they experienced teacher inquiry as part of an Honours teacher education programme. This grouping also enables me to distinguish between course-based teacher inquiries that are fundamentally different from school-based teacher inquiries. Course-based inquiries are usually conducted as individual projects when teachers are full-time or part-time students.

In Lisa's and Gemma's case, they were full-time university students pursuing further professional learning through an Honours teacher education programme. To fulfil the requirements of the course, they had to conduct a research project on teaching and learning.

Both used the “teaching as inquiry” cycle for their project. Since they were both provisionally-registered teachers, this course-based inquiry route may have allowed them to satisfy the professional inquiry requirement outlined for practising teachers (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2015). Both described their course-based inquiry projects as helpful introductions to future inquiries.

Prior to conducting this course-based teacher inquiry, they may have conducted different inquiries in their initial teacher education programme. Those inquiries would have been to meet the expectations of the Initial Teacher Education standards. In 2013, Aitken, Sinnema, and Meyer introduced the “Teaching for Better Learning” model to incorporate teacher inquiry skills within existing standards for initial teacher graduates (p. 19). They described this model as a natural precursor to adopting the “teaching as inquiry” approach outlined in the curriculum. This model promotes an “inquiry-oriented” stance towards student learning (Aitken et al., 2013, p. 19) and introduces pre-service teachers to professional inquiry.

Gemma briefly mentioned that she conducted some inquiries prior to her course-based teacher inquiry but it was unclear if these inquiries were to fulfil the initial teacher education standards. She associated her initial inquiries with an inquiry-learning experience that contrasted the way she experienced her course-based teacher inquiry. In her course-based teacher inquiry, she placed more emphasis on her professional learning as a teacher. She felt that this inquiry was a more realistic representation of the professional inquiries that teachers would conduct at schools. It is important to note that Lisa and Gemma had not taught full-time prior to these teacher inquiry projects, so they imagined that their experiences were representative of school-based teacher inquiries. In their stories, they describe high levels of autonomy, guidance, time and support during their inquiry process because they had inquired in a host classroom, under the guidance of a host teacher and university lecturers. Conducting

teacher inquiry under such circumstances may have cocooned their experiences and limited their exposure to external influences such as classroom, parent or school-wide expectations.

### *Lisa – Learning Moments*

I interviewed Lisa shortly after she completed her teacher inquiry project. She regarded the interview as an opportunity to reflect on her experience. She hoped that by talking to me she would be able to organise her thoughts for her upcoming presentation. We were both extremely nervous at the beginning of our ninety-minute conversation. She was nervous because it was her first experience as a participant while I was nervous because she was my first participant. I also realised that I did not have a good understanding of local teaching designations because provisionally-registered teachers were also primary school teachers.

Lisa recounted her teacher inquiry experience as a series of professional learning epiphanies. She designed her teacher inquiry project to explore how a bilingual teaching approach could provide Samoan students with more support in Mathematics. This project enabled her to experiment with alternative ways to teach and learn Mathematics. It caused her to explore culturally-responsive Mathematics language and concepts in Samoan and English. This bilingual approach allowed her to investigate the benefits and challenges of using multiple languages to teach Mathematics.

She framed her understanding of teacher inquiry through reflective moments that made her project meaningful to her. Her story highlighted her “ako” or reciprocal approach to teaching and learning. Through *ako*, both teachers and students are positioned as learners, because *ako* means “to teach and to learn” in Māori (Ministry of Education, 2009c, p. 28). Although she used research literature to justify the formal structure and justification for her inquiry, she ultimately relied on her own instincts when she was teaching. She seemed comfortable citing research literature to support her reflective thoughts and to make sense of her experience.

I found that many of the epiphanies she mentioned occurred when she interacted with her students. I believe that she viewed these epiphanies as shared learning moments because she believed that she could empower and value students' individual ways of knowing and demonstrating learning (Ministry of Education, 2009c, p. 28). Her collaborative approach to teaching and learning had a large influence on how she made sense of her teacher inquiry experience.

### Reciprocal Learning

*I was interested in Maths because I felt that it was something that was lacking in my teaching placements. Maths seemed to be the subject that was shifted or ignored when things came up. I was shocked because to me Maths was as important as literacy. My project consisted of six teaching sessions with six-year-olds. I took them out during Maths but they were not missing out because the others were doing what we were doing but they did not get the extra Samoan language. The teacher decided to teach length so I translated the vocabulary into Samoan. I felt a bit funny about not doing a pre-assessment because I know that you are supposed to do your own assessment to figure out where the kids are at and teach from there but there was nothing to go on. I started from the beginning because the teacher said it was their first touch of length.*

She chose to focus on Mathematics because it was a subject that held special meaning to her. Even though she saw her project as an opportunity to develop her teaching practice, she wanted to make sure that she did not disadvantage the students she worked with. She felt funny about her position as an outsider because she had to adjust her beliefs, values and practices to her host teacher's style. This restricted position made her question what she had learnt about formative assessments from her teaching programme.

*I spent a bit of time at the beginning of sessions on vocabulary because I thought it was important to spend time on developing the language rather than just the Maths lesson. That was a big learning for me because Maths almost has a language of its own. When I began my project, I asked if they played games during Maths and Kylie and Scott argued a little bit. I used the word “game” and I think Scott thought it had to do with balls and going outside whereas Kylie understood it as Maths games. It made me realise that there were two separate languages between me and the teacher even though it was English. When kids come from someone else teaching them for a year, they have to learn my language of Maths or Reading. This learning was accidental because it was outside what I expected to learn.*

The accidental learning moments that she experienced with her students caused her to reflect on things she took for granted such as the meaning of the word “game”. This made her more sensitive to the way that students had to adapt to different factors that influence their learning experiences. She found that these moments made her more cognisant of whom she wanted to be as a teacher.

*I had to come up with some teaching strategies. In the Gingerbread Men session, I had a printout of five Gingerbread Men in different sizes. When we discussed which one was the biggest and smallest, it was really hard to tell because they were not lined up and they had to figure it out without cutting them out. When they cut them out, Charlene cut inside the line and it was weird to me. I wondered if perhaps she had not been told to cut outside the line or it could be that it did not matter to her which way she did it. Scott and Charlene lined them up from biggest to smallest. Kylie and Jane lined them into a family structure with the two bigger ones on the outside and the little kids in the middle. They even named them. They could tell which ones*

*were bigger or smaller because I got them to label it. To me, it was about not having things too structured.*

There were many examples of her rationalising her thoughts and actions through research literature. This ease signalled that she was confident in her ability to use research as a source of knowledge. She used this knowledge to shape and justify her teaching philosophy. The ideas that she gained gave her the courage to become less rigid with her instructions and motivated her to create space for her students to express their own way of understanding. With an empathetic stance, she learnt to recognise and tap into students' prior knowledge. It also made her question the purpose assessment in greater depth.

*We also made bridges to get the Gingerbread Men from one side of the river to the other without getting wet. I had cardboard and an egg carton to see what they would come up with. Scott made a really high bridge out of cardboard and they were really into it except for Kylie. She had a bit of a tantrum and did not really want to participate because she could not be bothered but then she decided to cut the egg carton out. Then she said, "Oh look, stepping stones!" and I thought it was amazing because she thought outside the box. This showed me what they knew from outside the classroom and how learning was not about being right or wrong. Lots of the research literature I read said to make sure there were plenty of opportunities to discuss the content and the language they were using with each other. I made sure they were able to discuss and come up with how they were going to do what I had asked them to do. I think teachers forget that sometimes because you may feel like controlling everything to make it perfect but it is their work so I think you need to give it their voice. I learnt to slow down to engage them through think time and not talk over them because I felt awkward that there was nothing being said.*

She sounded mindful about whom she wanted to be as a teacher and spoke of a need to be less directive and prescriptive. She believed that this need had evolved from her growing awareness as a parent. Her views as a parent reminded her to value the creativity and uniqueness of each student and their learning experience. She wanted to adopt an empathetic approach to teaching that would enable her students to engage in learning in their own way.

*Their learning was about length, how to measure and identify something that was big, small, tall or long and acquiring vocabulary in English and Samoan. When I taught them the word for big in Samoan, they told me I pronounced it wrongly. I pronounced it as “tele” but they said it was “kele”. I found out from my husband that it was “kele” in street or lazy talk. So I explained to them that both were right but in a teaching situation, I had to use the right pronunciation. The different pronunciation was a learning curve for me and I let them know that I was learning too. I told them that it was ako so we were all learning. It was another way to let them know that making mistakes is how we learn so I thanked them for telling and helping me with my language. I learnt that setting up an inclusive and safe environment for them to learn was really important. I made sure I was deliberate with these things in my teaching. This whole experience will help me set up my classroom and practice because I know it works.*

She regarded her teacher inquiry project as a valuable professional learning experience. This experience gave her the opportunity to experiment, reflect and envision her emergent teaching practice. By applying the insights that she gained from research literature into her inquiry, she gained a realistic understanding of how research can be used to support or justify her teaching philosophy and practice. This course-based teacher inquiry gave her the opportunity to apply a research-informed approach to teaching, which is something the Ministry of Education (2007) advocated for in the “teaching as inquiry” cycle.



## Understanding Ako

In her stories, Lisa tended to blend personal and professional views. When I recognised the inextricable nature of these views, I stopped trying to make sense of them separately. Instead, I worked to identify the larger themes such as emergent teaching practice, teacher inquiry, and her developing sense of identity and professionalism. Since she had a strong desire to be culturally aware as a teacher, she concentrated on culturally-responsive teaching strategies that would be useful to her future practice.

I found her desire to gain cultural awareness interesting. For example, even though she inquired into the needs of Samoan students in her project, she made a passing reference to *ako* as a teaching philosophy. In an *ako* approach, teachers and students play dual roles. They are both teachers and learners because *ako* is a reciprocal way to view education. In the Tātaiako, this Māori concept was propounded as a cultural competency that teachers should aspire towards when working with Māori students (Ministry of Education, 2011b).

In the Tātaiako”, a government publication that outlines cultural competencies for teachers of Māori students, they publicised the importance of cultivating learning as a relationship between teachers and students. *Ako* was depicted as a teaching mindset that could help teachers to better engage Māori students in meaningful learning opportunities (Ministry of Education, 2011b, p. 4). This concept of reciprocity is also a guiding principle within the 2013-2017 Ka Hikitia, a government initiative aimed at improving the educational experiences of Māori students. Both publications promote educational practices that empower Māori to be educated as Māori (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 11). These publications exhibit how and why Māori beliefs, values and practices are an integral part of enabling Māori students to flourish in their learning. In these publications, *ako* is an educational mindset that can elevate the learning experiences of Māori students.

An *ako* mindset to teaching positions teachers as co-constructors of learning because teachers are framed as co-learners in the process of teaching and learning. This understanding *ako* enabled me to make better sense of how Lisa viewed herself in the inquiry process. I found the way that she shifted between her teaching and learning voices fascinating because these shifts exposed how she tried to understand her actions based on students' responses. This approach permitted her to recognise and cater to differentiated needs, which prompted her to understand how their learning could be connected to their life experience or background.

I think she used an *ako* lens to justify her teaching approach and to make sense of her students' behaviour and motivations. Upon understanding the implications of an *ako* approach to teaching and learning, I reread her stories with a new perspective. Through an *ako* lens, I was able to interpret her stories differently. In my want to understand *ako*, I began to examine *kaupapa* Māori or Māori philosophy in greater depth. This exploration led me towards teacher learning programmes that have *kaupapa* influence.

### Alternative Approaches to Teacher Learning

In teacher learning, teachers learn professionally to further their skills and knowledge. Teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning can be interpreted as a formal way for teachers to examine their practice in order to learn from it. However, in teacher policies such as teacher inquiry, teachers' position as learners may be overshadowed by prescriptive expectations, rigid interpretations or implementations of policies that circumscribe what teachers should learn or how teachers should teach.

In a bicultural nation, the government has the responsibility to address the existing inequalities in education. This situation is especially urgent for Māori students, who have continued to underperform. According to the Ministry of Education, one way to address this situation is to promote the quality of teaching, which can be influenced by strategic forms of

teacher learning such as teacher inquiry. This focus on quality teaching was publicised in the Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis programme where teachers were positioned at the heart of improvement agendas.

In the “Quality Teaching for Diverse students in Schooling” Best Evidence Synthesis, Alton-Lee (2003) called teaching “the most influential point of leverage” on student learning (p. 2). She outlined suggestions that could change existing teaching attitudes and practices, and promoted teaching as a pivotal factor in enhancing student learning experiences (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. 5). These notions frame teaching and student learning in a causal relationship, where teaching can be understood to make an impact or lack of an impact on student learning. This causal perspective implies that teachers and school leaders should be responsible for student learning and it also implies that both might have contributed to the existing educational inequalities. These implications are highlighted in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle where teachers are asked to examine how their teaching practices have contributed to existing patterns of learning and achievement (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xliii). When this cycle was published as a teacher learning policy in the Teachers’ Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration, it shaped how teachers and teaching were discussed in learning improvement agendas.

The demand for quality teaching is endorsed by the incumbent Minister of Education, Hekia Parata (2015). She claimed that “the quality teaching in the classroom” makes the “biggest difference” to education because “schooling factors collectively had a much greater impact on student achievement than home background” (Johnston, 2015). This focus on improving the quality of teaching also pervades the Education Review Office’s view on how teachers inquire (Education Review Office, 2012c). Such an intensified emphasis on quality teaching tends to create the impression that existing teaching practices are lacking, which increases the importance of teacher learning. However, this focus on teacher learning is slightly different

from previous conceptions because there is a heavier emphasis on teacher learning that can demonstrate an impact on student learning. This link between teacher learning and student learning validates the strategic teacher-learning design envisioned in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlv). In this teacher learning cycle, student learning needs are used to inform teacher learning initiatives. Whilst this focus seemed to be a logical way to increase the impact of teacher learning, it made me wonder if there were other ways to meet the needs of both teachers and students in professional learning initiatives.

In my want to understand an *ako* approach to teaching and learning, I examined “Te Kotahitanga”, a professional development programme that focused on supporting teachers to improve Māori students’ education. Te Kotahitanga was a *kaupapa* Māori research project that focused on ways to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in secondary schools (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter, & Clapham, 2012). Researchers worked with Māori students, their whānau (extended family or community), principals and teachers to create an “Effective Teaching Profile” (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007). This project was a collaborative effort to better understand what Māori students needed in order to be successful in their learning experiences. The six elements in the profile accentuated the importance of developing caring, supportive and positive relationships between teachers and students.

In this programme, *ako* was described as an “interactive dialogic relationship” that enabled teachers to establish meaningful connections with their students (Bishop et al., 2009, p. 737). This interdependent relationship can be seen as a way to shape the power relations within teaching and learning relationships. It made me think of the concept of “tino rangatiratanga” or “self-determination” (Bishop, 2003, p. 225), a central message within *kaupapa* Māori. *Tino rangatiratanga* translates as “the right to determine one’s own destiny, to define what

that destiny will be and to define and pursue means of attaining that destiny in relation to others” (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 10). When this concept is applied to learning, students act on their *tinō rangatiratanga* when they participate actively in the process of designing, informing and managing their learning.

Promoting self-determination as a desirable attitude towards learning can motivate students to take more interest in their learning. When teachers take heed of the power differentials in teaching and learning relationships, they could be more open and receptive to alternative ways to respect and honour their students’ *tinō rangatiratanga*. When this concept is extended to students’ *whānau*, it can nurture partnerships of learning between schools and communities. This benefits everyone in the teaching and learning relationship because it creates communication between students, their *whānau*, teachers and school leaders. It gives everyone an agentic role in creating culturally-responsive learning environments for students. This made me consider how an *ako* approach to teaching could increase students’ *tinō rangatiratanga* and it helped me to understand how researchers in Te Kotahitanga could have envisioned positive teaching and learning relationships.

In Te Kotahitanga, teachers were encouraged to investigate their implicit beliefs about Māori students. Researchers found that teachers’ ontological perspectives, or potential “deficit theorising” (Bishop et al., 2009, p. 737), were influencing their practices so they created critical opportunities for teachers to examine their practices constructively. They found ways to assist teachers in creating “culturally responsive pedagogy of relations” (Bishop et al., 2009, p. 736) with their Māori students. They treated teachers’ deficit thinking as opportunities for transformation and guided teachers towards changing their practices. This made me extremely curious about how these researchers were able to support teachers as they confronted their deficit thinking and practices. I delved further into *kaupapa* Māori to better understand their approach.

I looked into “tikanga Māori (Māori protocols and practices)” (Hudson, Milne, Reynolds, Russell, & Smith, 2010, p. 1) or the Māori way of conducting research. Through a *kaupapa* approach, *tikanga* is observed to prioritise the “preservation of mana (justice and equity reflected through power and authority)” (Hudson et al., 2010, p. 2). This meant that researchers with *kaupapa* motivations would apply *tikanga* to protect their participants’ *mana*, which could make the approach more meaningful because it was self-empowering. In Te Kotahitanga, teachers’ *mana* or “power/status” (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 10) was respected and nurtured despite their deficit stances. By privileging teachers’ *mana*, they respected teachers as learners and nurtured positive relationships with them. These relationships could have fostered a climate of trust and support that provoked teachers to think differently about themselves and their practices.

I think that the researchers may have adopted a “manaakitanga (caring for others)” approach to professional learning because they wanted teachers to develop their “own discursive positioning” (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 25). This supportive way of guiding teachers to interrogate themselves placed the onus on teachers to envision changes that could transform their existing way of thinking. Teachers were invited to be reflective about themselves and the consequences of deficit approaches. In this safe thinking and dialogic space, teachers developed more awareness and appreciation for the learning needs of Māori students (Bishop, 2012, p. 198). This motivated teachers to experiment with strategies that could create “culturally appropriate and responsive” learning contexts (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 25). In this approach, efforts to honour teachers’ *mana* were implemented as they worked towards acquiring more cultural awareness and sensitivity (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 25). This stance changed the way that I thought about teacher learning. It challenged me to think of ways that teachers could be respected as learners and teachers in the process of learning.

I thought further about how these researchers had managed to turn difficult discussions into opportunities for growth. When *manaakitanga* occurs, “the mana of both parties is upheld” (Hudson et al., 2010, p. 12) because efforts to share, distribute or balance power are negotiated. Through *manaakitanga*, teachers in the project were able to learn professionally at their own pace. In *kaupapa* Māori, *manaakitanga* plays a vital role because “here mana akiaki [empowerment] empowers **partnerships**” which is in turn “enhanced by the level of the parties’ faith and trust in each other [**whakapono**]” (Hudson et al., 2010, p. 12, emphasis in original). In short, teachers in the project were empowered to learn by themselves and this increased their trust in the researchers who were guiding them.

Exploring these Māori concepts helped me to imagine how the researchers in Te Kotahitanga could have approached the teacher learning process and rewarded me with a more profound view of teacher learning. By investigating how and why these researchers were successful in their endeavour to expose teachers to culturally-sensitive practices, I became more aware of how an appreciative stance can empower and motivate teachers to reflect critically upon themselves. Even though teachers demonstrated deficit thinking and practices, the researchers found ways to retain their *mana* because Te Kotahitanga was designed with a *manaakitanga* (caring) mindset. These Māori concepts helped me to envision the teacher learning process differently.

These insights from Te Kotahitanga are of importance to teacher learning initiatives such as teacher inquiry because there is a need to ameliorate existing educational inequalities in New Zealand. The Education Review Office (2012a) published a synthesis on priority students that highlighted how teachers lacked the cultural awareness and responsiveness to help these student populations succeed academically (p. 15). They concluded that teachers needed to change their mindset and practices in order to make a difference. I believe that one of the ways to address the needs of students, especially Māori students, is through teacher learning

initiatives that allow teachers to be better acquainted with the values and beliefs that underpin their practice. This can be achieved through teacher inquiry if teachers are provided with critical but supportive guidance that can encourage them to examine themselves.

My exploration of Te Kotahitanga and *kaupapa* Māori helped me to understand how an affirmative approach to teacher learning can be beneficial. I see teachers portrayed in a similar light in the “Ka Hikitia” and “Tātaiako” publications. These publications positioned teachers as collaborators rather than contributors to educational success. This distinction is important because as collaborators of learning, teachers also position themselves as learners. This *ako* approach teaching and learning could change the way that teachers form learning partnerships with their students.

When an *ako* approach is adopted, there is more emphasis on “working together and sharing power” (Ministry of Education, 2009a, p. 11). By encouraging teachers and students to view teaching and learning as a partnership, both can learn to value their relationship as a process of symbiotic growth. This *ako* mindset will allow teachers and students to retain their *mana* in the process of teaching and learning. When teachers and students work together to negotiate *mana*, both parties benefit. This reciprocal relationship hints at the constructive experiences that teachers could have experienced through Te Kotahitanga.

In this exploration, I touched upon some of the insights into teacher learning that a *kaupapa* Māori approach could offer. Since New Zealand is a bicultural nation, I believe that it is important to consider *kaupapa* Māori insights and underpinnings in teacher learning policies. In this discussion, I wanted to show that a *kaupapa* Māori mindset could positively influence the teacher inquiry process. Perhaps further examination of a *kaupapa* Māori approach to teacher learning could turn teacher inquiry into a more egalitarian form of teacher learning.



### *Gemma – Reflective Intentions*

I met Gemma when I attended Lisa's teacher inquiry presentation. Gemma had taken the same course a year prior and was in the process of completing her Master's research. She was the only teacher who brought the New Zealand Curriculum with her so that she could refer to the "teaching as inquiry" cycle as she reflected on her experience. During the two-hour interview, she described her teacher inquiry project as a learning experience that allowed her to develop her sense of identity as a teacher. Our conversation took on a philosophical tone because we both believed that reflection was an embedded part of teaching, learning and teacher inquiry.

She recounted how her project made her more appreciative of what teachers do to meet their students' needs. She construed teaching as a process that focused on learning outcomes. She stated that teacher inquiry was a necessary part of teaching because it requires teachers to pay attention to the impact of their actions. This reminded me of the way that the "teaching as inquiry" cycle had been outlined in the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35). With this sense of accountability, she believed that critically-reflective teachers scrutinise their practice because they are motivated to improve student learning and achievement. She stated that this motivation incited teachers to learn professionally because teachers learnt to better their practices. She construed teacher inquiry as a way for teachers to become more responsive to their students' learning needs and preferences.

### A Reflective Experience

*The whole idea of the course was to learn about teacher inquiry from a teacher's perspective. We had to focus on what we could do through the inquiry process to better an outcome. I did a teacher inquiry to see how I could raise the literacy achievement levels of children in low-decile schools by increasing parental*

*involvement. There was a need for some children who were under the achievement level to increase their reading achievement. The class teacher said their motivation and parental involvement were low.*

*I read research literature on reading achievement and found that it was about attitude, motivation and enjoyment of reading. I realised that motivation was important for both children and parents because children were only going to be motivated if their parents were also motivated. I came up with simple guiding sheets to teach parents what they needed to do at home. I modelled how their parents should do it so that the children were familiar with the process and could help to teach their parents. They started to enjoy reading at home which they did not before. The sheet gave parents autonomy in reading with their child at home so they became confident with helping their child.*

*I reflected to see how it went because I had to see the outcome of what I did. The power of inquiry is to go, "That did not work!", but it was important that it did not work because now I can change and make it better for next time. It was interesting to see that children could really be motivated. I minimised things that they did not want to do and increased the things that they loved. We looked at different types of books that they could read by spending time in the library and choosing books that really interested them. Understanding their needs was one of the biggest things that I learnt because knowing what they enjoy, where their achievement level was at and what they struggled with, created success.*

*My teacher inquiry presentation was important to allow different teachers to understand my process, what I found and what we can do better in our teaching worlds. I talked about how the whole process resulted in increased motivation and*

*attitudes. When they were retested at the end of my project, they were at their reading levels. It was important for teachers to understand how to be able to create change. The big thing that came out for me was thinking about where to from here. My project showed positive outcomes but it was important to continue the project further for the ones that are at or above level.*

Her course-based teacher inquiry gave her increased exposure to research literature and led her to focus on strategies that could improve home literacy practices. In her project, she designed an intervention to raise the reading levels of a small-group of low-performing students. She worked closely with these students to find ways of motivating them to read at home. This focused contact enabled her to appreciate the importance of getting to know students and their individual needs.

She identified these students by their National Standards reading levels. She felt that her goal to increase reading motivation through home literacy practices was successful because their reading levels improved at the end of her project. While she was aware that her inquiry was limited to a small number of students, she decided that an intervention-based approach to teaching was practical because it caused her to focus on measurable ways to show learning progress and teaching effectiveness. This experience led her to conceive teacher inquiry as a research-based initiative to improve student learning. She also appeared to support the notion that teacher learning initiatives could be based on the needs of students, a notion that was promoted in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-based cycle. In this approach, teacher learning is made more effective and purposeful because it is based on student learning needs.

*I am glad that I did this project because I feel that I can go into the classroom and do inquiry all the time or as much as I want to. When you do teacher inquiry you are not just a teacher who just teaches but you are one that critiques what is going on. It was*

*empowering to learn that you can create change by being critical about the teaching process. The critical thought process from inquiry is really important in my day-to-day teaching. All the phases within “teaching as inquiry” are not going to piece together if you do not reflect on them. It was a powerful thing to learn how to be reflective because I had to be reflective to find out the next stage. I had to work out what it meant to me but there is quite a bit on the line when you are reflecting honestly. You put yourself on the line and you have to be strong because it affects your self-confidence. Through this, I learnt how to reflect beyond ticking a box and now reflection weaves throughout my practice.*

She described teacher inquiry as a reflective and critical way to examine teaching practice. During her inquiry, she reflected to understand the impact of her actions and to become more self-aware of her motivations to reflect. Her teacher inquiry reflections were different from how she had conceptualised reflection in her teaching placement. She found her teacher inquiry reflections to be more purposeful, realistic and practical because they were connected to next steps. This sounded similar to the way that the learning inquiry was depicted in the “teaching as inquiry” cycle where teachers reflect on the impact of their teaching to inform future actions (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35). She reflected to monitor her thoughts and actions closely and this heightened her self-awareness. This led her to conclude that critical reflection could be an emotionally- and intellectual-challenging experience for teachers. When she indicated that she reflected beyond professional expectations, it sounded as if she embraced reflective thinking as a way of being.

*Doing this has improved my understanding of the teacher as a learner. I did not know what the students’ needs were until I found out. I did not know what this process would entail until I actually tried it. I now know and believe that I can do this process. I learnt that I do not know everything but I can reflect and realise that there is a*

*better way to do things. I learnt that I learn through research, reflecting, understanding children and through professional conversations with other people. Teacher inquiry is dealing with students' needs and understanding how to better my performance so that I can increase teaching, learning and achievement because this is how I can be a better teacher and help students achieve. I hope that I am confident and strong in what I believe but I also hope that I am flexible in thought and open to new ideas because I am continuously going to be a learner.*

She valued her teacher inquiry project because it helped her to become more critical and reflective of her teacher practice. Through her project, she saw how teacher inquiry could be used to create teacher learning opportunities. She believed that teachers needed to become lifelong learners if they wanted to be effective teachers. Teachers need to stay open-minded and flexible because these traits help them to remain critical.

### Reflective Motivations

Gemma reflected on her teacher inquiry experience by analysing how the experience had contributed to her emergent sense of identity. This realisation led me to the central thread within her narrative; her conception of teacher inquiry as a critical and reflective process that focused on increasing student achievement and teaching performance. In her project, she paid attention to increasing reading levels because she wanted to demonstrate how her intervention had a measurable impact on student learning.

Her concern with demonstrating teaching impact reminded me of the way the Education Review Office (2012c) defined effective reflection as a process of active monitoring to maximise student outcomes (p. 18). According to the Education Review Office (2012c), Schön's "reflection in action" can be expressed as productive "inner dialogue or self-talk about teaching practice" within the inquiry process (p. 20). They supported this form of

active reflection because it attunes teachers to their students' learning needs. They also exemplified how this kind of inner reflection is observable when it is linked explicitly to planned outcomes (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 20). This links attempt to portray student learning as a professional motivation to reflect. While this motivation to reflect appears to be logical, it may change how teachers reflect.

Schön (1995) envisaged “reflection in action” as a source of knowledge that resides within practitioners. He advanced the concepts of “reflection in and on action” to foreground the knowledge within teachers' practical ways of knowing. His ideas implied that teachers possess this practical knowledge because reflection is an implicit part of teaching. In the need to raise the quality of teaching, the Education Review Office (2012c) has called for teachers to make these internal reflections more transparent to others. When teachers make their reflections explicit, it stimulates professional dialogue and allows others to better comprehend teachers' practical knowledge.

When teachers inquire into their practice, they create opportunities to reflect on the values, beliefs and thoughts that inform their actions. This reflective space is beneficial because it presents teachers with opportunities to explore who they are as teachers and to learn from their practice. Rodgers (2002) used Dewey's ideas to discuss how reflection can be a “meaning-making process” that could culminate as a “theory to live by” (p. 849). She described reflection as a method that teachers could use to turn their practical insights into theories of practice. When reflection is used for this purpose, it becomes a rigorous way of thinking that prompts teachers to be mindful of their practice and to be receptive of new ways of conceiving practice. This alludes to the notion that reflection is a purposeful act that teachers should engage in when they inquire into their practice.

Schön (1995) furthered Dewey's concept of reflection by valorising teachers' tacit knowing as a form of practical knowledge. This knowledge materialises when teachers reflect "in and on action" (Schön, 1995, p. 34). He advanced this implicit form of knowing to challenge technicist views on education and his ideas suggest that teachers' ways of knowing might extend beyond visible and measurable means. Since Schön's (1995) endorsement of practical knowledge, his ideas on reflection have often been associated with professional motivations to reflect. For example, in New Zealand teachers have to demonstrate how they are being reflective of their practice in order to remain certificated (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2015). The Education Review Office (2012c) strengthened the link between professional reflection and teacher inquiry by explicitly describing Schön's "reflection in action" as the "most advanced phase in the development of inquiry as a way of operating" (p. 20). Perhaps this was to encourage teachers to see the link between inquiry and reflection.

Reflective thinking within teaching has deep historical roots. Continuing discourse around teaching as a reflective practice is merited since reflection has been entrenched as an attribute of professional teaching. The Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand asks its practising teachers to provide evidence that they have satisfied twelve professional criteria every three years. In the eleventh and twelfth criteria, reflection is associated with teaching effectiveness and refinement (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2015). These criteria depict reflection as a skill that teachers must develop and hone in order to be professional. This depiction is consistent with how Gemma defined reflection as a professional obligation.

The way that Gemma described her reflective process made me consider the notion that there could be adverse repercussions to purposefully-designed teacher reflections. According to the Education Review Office (2012c), teachers who develop an "inquiry habit of mind" reflect on their practices to make changes that could make "the most differences to students' achievement and progress" (p. 18). However, this emphasis on achievement and progress

could be misinterpreted as a narrow focus on learning, which could influence how teachers construe the purpose of reflection. If teachers construed teacher inquiry narrowly as a tool to increase student achievement, the reflective part of their inquiry would be curtailed by technical rationality. In the pursuit of results, they might prioritise teaching efficiency rather than teacher efficacy. Such a misinterpretation could summarily reduce reflection into a mechanised act that teachers perform to fulfil professional accountability measures. With these thoughts, I thought it would be useful to highlight other purposes for reflection.

### Exploring Teaching as a Reflective Practice

Teacher inquiry is most associated with the “teaching as inquiry” cycle (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 6). The Education Review Office (2012c) described the “teaching as inquiry” cycle as a “teaching and learning inquiry” (p. 6). This depicted teacher inquiry as a critical and reflective tool that teachers can use to investigate the impact of their teaching actions. This purpose is in contrast to the “professional learning inquiry” that teachers and school leaders conduct to examine the “gaps in teachers’ practices” via the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 7). These differences indicate that the purpose of teacher inquiry can determine what teachers reflect on when they inquire.

In his study of teachers’ reflective practices, Benade (2015) questioned the omission of “collaborative, critical” attitudes that underpinned the “teaching as inquiry” cycle (p. 116). The omission of these stances could have changed the way that teachers interpreted the purpose and process of teacher inquiry. It may have reduced teacher inquiry to “an instrumental formula” that did not urge teachers to consider how their “beliefs and assumptions” could affect their teaching practice (Benade, 2015, p. 116). He suggested that



this omission could lead teachers to focus narrowly on practical instead of critical issues that underpin their practice.

These collaborative and critical components were mentioned in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle. In this cycle, teacher inquiry was depicted as a collective effort to improve the quality of teaching and student learning. Since this version of teacher inquiry promotes teacher learning that is based on student needs, teachers reflect to evaluate the collective effectiveness of their teaching efforts (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlv). Here, reflection is used as a means to gauge the impact of teaching actions. Even though this cycle is a teacher learning policy, it appears that the professional learning that teachers may gain from their inquiries is an underemphasised facet of teacher inquiry because the focus in this cycle is on improving student learning. This lack of emphasis on the teacher learning might be concerning because it affects the way that teachers construe the purpose of professional learning.

All three teacher inquiry cycles and models share a similar focus on examining the impact of teaching actions because this focus is believed to be a means to improve the quality of teaching. This emphasis is indicative of neo-liberal views that have dominated the educational landscape since the early nineties (O'Neill, 2010). In the current teaching climate, demands for teachers to produce measurable results in terms of student learning have been normalised as calls for increased professionalism. These demands may push teaching closer towards a culture of “performativity” where calls for quality teaching and teaching effectiveness are frequent and relentless (Ball, 2003, p. 216). As such, the current emphasis on quality teaching is worrisome because it suggests that the teaching culture may be headed towards a future of performativity.

While there are well-intentioned agendas that promote student learning within a culture of performativity, the increasing demands and pressures placed on teachers to perform may cause teachers like me to question the larger purpose of education. A part of me agrees with some of the measures to hold teachers more accountable and responsible for their actions, but it also makes me wonder if a heightened focus on teaching performance or outcomes could adequately address the issues surrounding education. Could a focus on teaching effectiveness or quality provide students with the education that they need to lead better lives?

To explore this further, I considered what Kemmis (2012) meant by a vision of education that can contribute to a “world worth living in” (p. 898). Kemmis (2012) envisioned education to serve two purposes, the “good for each person” as well as the “good for humankind” (p. 895). This dual focus illustrates the individual and social significance of educational praxis or teaching. When teaching is regarded as “*educational* action that is morally-committed and informed by traditions in a field” (Kemmis, 2012, p. 894), it frames teaching as a personal and social practice. Teaching carries “moral, social and political consequences” that can influence “history making *educational* action” (Kemmis, 2012, p. 894). These views portray education as a potential means to promote more egalitarian views of society.

In this vision of education, teachers play a contributing role in social transformation. They inquire into their practices because they want to understand the ethical and moralistic implications of their actions. They may inquire to examine the “politicity of education” (Freire, Freire, & Oliveira, 2014, p. 25). Freire et al. (2014) postulated that teaching is a political act because “education never was and never will be neutral” (p. 25). These types of inquiries increase teachers’ awareness and knowledge of the situational or contextual challenges that pervade education systems and society. In this type of teacher inquiry, teachers reflect on the values, beliefs and philosophies that they promote in their practices. These deep inquiries may incite teachers to examine the immediate and long-term impact of

their teaching, which produces inquiries that go beyond the mere need to fulfil professional obligations. In this vision of education, teacher inquiry may be envisaged as a personal, professional and social responsibility. In their inquiries, teachers will reflect on the practical, technical and critical aspects of teaching.

I borrowed van Manen's (1977) different levels of reflectivity to explain this theorisation further. At the "first level of deliberative rationality", teachers reflect on the "technical application of educational knowledge" (van Manen, 1977, p. 226). Teachers reflect on their teaching to improve their "economy, efficiency and effectiveness" (van Manen, 1977, p. 226). This type of reflection pays close attention to the practical aspects of teaching that can demonstrate measurable effects on student learning.

As Benade (2015) argued, this level of reflection is inadequate because it is motivated by a technicist view of teaching and learning that fails to address the deeper issues within teaching practices. Benade (2015) advocated for more "critically reflective" inquiries that encourage teachers to delve into entrenched "assumptions and beliefs" that underpin their practices (p. 118). This deeper examination compels teachers to scrutinise the implicit and tacit factors that have shaped their practices. The motivation for these critical inquiries would be to encourage teachers to reflect and align their practical theories to external expectations (van Manen, 1977, p. 226). This kind of critical reflection implies an acceptance or acquiescence of the agendas that undergird the education system. These critical inquiries and reflections enable teachers to become more proficient at interpreting curricula, policies and interventions designed by others. While teachers may play agentic roles when they align their practices to outlined expectations, they continue to act as implementers of policies.

To go beyond this role, teachers will need to develop a different kind of criticality. van Manen (1977) called this reflection that is motivated by the "politico-ethical meaning of

social wisdom” (p. 227). This kind of critical reflection is motivated by a desire to examine the larger issues surrounding teaching, learning and education. Teachers may then be interested in the social, cultural, political and economic agendas that shape their practice because they construe teaching as a political and social responsibility. These responsibilities motivate them to be aware of the multifaceted challenges that go beyond their classrooms and schools. It makes teachers more inclined to scrutinise the ideologies underpinning the education system. When teachers develop these critical thinking skills and knowledge, they may want to play participatory roles in educational and social change. Perhaps this level of critical reflection goes beyond the “critically reflective practice” Benade (2015, p. 118) recommended because it includes the larger issues permeating the education system.

In all three levels of reflection, teachers are encouraged to develop critical thinking and reflective skills. These reflective purposes move teachers towards questioning themselves and their practices. When these critical thinking skills are fostered, teachers may develop the awareness and motivation to ask different questions about themselves and their practices. I believe that this internal shift occurred for me during this study because I was compelled to examine the assumptions that I had about the purpose of teaching, learning and education. These reflective moments encouraged me to broaden my understanding and to consider alternative visions of education. It led me towards the work of Kemmis (2012) and towards a vision of education that can promote the good of humankind. These ideas compelled me to reflect differently on myself and my work on teachers.

In my search to understand the power of reflection, I pondered how education could be used to “establish interpersonal and social conditions necessary for genuine self-understanding, emancipatory learning and critical consciousness” (van Manen, 1977, p. 221), which led me to the pedagogical ideas of Paulo Freire. In “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, Freire (1972) envisaged an alternative way to promote teaching and learning. He theorised that “problem-

posing education” could provoke “true reflection and action upon reality” (Freire, 1972, p. 56). This type of education cultivates critical reflective skills that empower and influence people to think differently about their surroundings. People reflect to problematise their routinized ways of thinking and acting. His conception of critical thinking and reflection incites people to challenge dominant social and political paradigms.

To depict this possibility, he described life as a “process of *becoming*” (Freire, 1972, p. 57). This state of incompleteness promotes the idea of change and destabilises static constructions of reality. When reality is depicted as a fluid, social construct, it creates room to envision reality in terms of possibilities. These concepts are revolutionary and compelling when applied to social and education change because they position teachers in participatory roles. In these roles, teachers inquire differently because they want to understand how their thoughts and actions may be promoting “a certain theory of knowledge” (Freire, 1985b, p. 17). Perhaps these confronting ideas may induce more critical dialogue about the repercussions of remaining silent in the face of contentious educational changes that can affect the lives of teachers and students.

When teachers engage in critical debate about reality, they seek to understand their positions in existing power structures (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 181). This knowledge could compel them to question different aspects of their professional landscape. In Schön’s (1991) work, he described the educational landscape metaphorically as highlands and lowlands. He used this to underscore the importance of investigating intricate educational issues that lie in the lowlands even though it may be easier to focus on solvable technical issues in the highlands (Schon, 1991, p. 42). Despite his belief that the messy issues in the lowlands were multifaceted and complicated, he emphasised the need to continue examining these issues because they house the complex nature of education.

Education is influenced by a confluence of social, economic, cultural and political forces. John Dewey, an educational philosopher, advocated for education to be shaped by the “intellectual, moral and emotional growth of a democratic society” (as cited in Rodgers, 2002, p. 845). These aspects of growth locate the purpose and vision of education in the realm of possibilities. When education is envisaged in terms of possibilities, there is room to contemplate the social, political, moral and ethical underpinnings of teaching. There is space to imagine teacher inquiries that reflect on the “how” as well as the “why” of teaching, where teachers can inquire into technical, practical and critical aspects of teaching.

When education is located in the realm of possibilities, teacher inquiry can be used to promote all three levels of reflection. Such a vision cannot be imposed; it can only be nurtured over time. These philosophical ideas can be developed through critical dialogue about teaching and learning. According to Larrivee (2000), critical reflection is a “way of life” that is experienced through personal and professional growth (p. 306). She conjectured that this growth occurs when teachers are motivated to go through different stages of self-discovery. She also emphasised how these stages cannot be “prescribed with an intervention formula” because “it must be lived” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 306). The desire to reflect critically stems from teachers’ motivation to understand their practice and professional responsibilities, which I believe can be fostered through teacher inquiry.

In this exploration, I may not have found definitive answers to my question, “Could a focus on teaching effectiveness or quality provide students with the education that they need to lead better lives?” but the ideas that I have discussed led me to conclude that increasing teachers’ reflective capacities could enhance their overall knowledge and awareness. When I frame these ideas in terms of teacher inquiry, I find myself agreeing with Benade’s (2015, p. 118) suggestion to further develop the critical and reflective aspects within the teacher inquiry

process. Perhaps developing these aspects further could broaden the way that teaching effectiveness and quality are envisioned and discussed.

## **Tammy – Cultural Accountability**

I met Tammy through a doctoral acquaintance. Tammy was a seasoned Samoan teacher. I was excited about our interview because it was my first visit to a New Zealand primary school. We met at her school staffroom and she introduced me to her principal as a doctoral student who was interested in hearing her teacher inquiry experiences. I remember how her principal stiffened at the words “teacher inquiry”. He proceeded to inform me that all the teachers at his school were doing it! He even reminded Tammy to show me her professional development folder because it contained her teacher inquiry documentation.

This was my first but not the last encounter that I have had with school principals reacting defensively to the words “teacher inquiry”. At the time, I did not understand what teacher inquiry meant to school leaders. In subsequent encounters with other school leaders, I learnt that teacher inquiry was a form of teacher evaluation that was normally associated with visits by the Education Review Office. During these school visits, teachers and school leaders would have to show evidence of teacher inquiries and other professional development initiatives.

Luckily, this encounter with Tammy’s principal flustered me more than it did Tammy because I spent the first few minutes of our interview restating my genuine interest in her experiences. Thankfully our conversation took an easy and relaxed pace and we spoke for approximately two hours. In all that time, she did not once refer to her professional development folder. Instead, she chose to speak of how she inquired to monitor her students’ learning progress. This understanding influenced her conceptualisation of formal teacher inquiry and she construed inquiry as a means to measure the impact of her teaching actions on student learning.



She believed that this impact could be demonstrated through the National Standards scale where learning progress was depicted as a trajectory. She described this visual trajectory of learning as a useful way for her to describe learning progress to student and parents. She welcomed the formalisation of teacher inquiry because it increased the transparency and accountability within her practice.

#### *A National Standards Perspective of Learning*

*At a staff meeting, we were told that we had been doing it for many years, ever since we became teachers but for some people now, they are saying it is important because it is a pedagogical way of putting your teaching in perspective. I suppose it is because you know where your child is at and where you are going towards with your teaching for that child's achievement. I did my formal one this year but when I read about it, I giggled because I have been doing it for many years. It has always been my way of knowing that the kids in front of me are learning at their level and pace but now I can see what I am doing in the National Standards perspective.*

It was evident from the onset of our conversation that Tammy embraced the formalisation of teacher inquiry wholeheartedly. She conceived formalised teacher inquiry as a process of documenting the informal inquiries she habitually conducted on her students. To her, teacher inquiry was part of teaching because she inquired to monitor her students' individual learning progress. She believed that student achievement was a testament of her teaching effectiveness.

The formalisation of teacher inquiry made it easier for her to communicate how her teaching practice had contributed towards student learning progress. Based on these beliefs, she rationalised that the National Standards trajectory of learning was a helpful perspective on student learning. This trajectory enabled her to have a future-focused perspective of student

achievement. Even though she thought of student learning in terms of achievement, she appeared to understand that the trajectory outlined aspirational benchmarks rather than definitive measurements of achievement. This view was in line with the “broad” depiction of learning promoted within the National Standards policy (Chamberlain, 2010). Since Tammy had always worked in a multi-aged classroom, she valued the age-delimited progression within the trajectory. She used the National Standards levels to append her individualised approach to student learning.

*Teacher inquiry is important because it helps teachers look at where their kids are at and whether what you have been doing is of any use for them because you want and need to know. If it is not working, you change to another type of teaching straight away. Even though you do teacher inquiry for a little group you think about the rest of your class as well. You cannot carry on doing the same type of teaching when you see those kids have not moved and that is the reason why it is important. The accountability of what you do to those kids is so high because they are relying on you. There is a lot of recording and paperwork but when you get used to it, it becomes second nature. There are lots of things that you can see from your data. You evaluate data-based outcomes to see where kids are at and it is helpful. I can see the value of teacher inquiry because you are accountable to the kids, parents, and school. It is also easier because you have all that data in front of them to show whether that was successful or not.*

She differentiated between formal and informal teacher inquiry. She pointed out that formal inquiries were more focused inquiries into the needs of a small group of students. In addition to these inquiries, she also conducted informal inquiries to better understand the needs of other students. Since these inquiries were informal, she did not perceive the need to collect as much assessment data. Even though formal inquiries were more selective, there were more

data collection and paperwork expectations. She described these increased expectations as a necessary part of her responsibility as a professional.

The increased attention to assessment data in her teacher inquiry process seemed to affirm her belief that teaching has a measurable impact on learning. She believed that this increased focus on assessment data and National Standard levels could provide parents with a clearer understanding of how learning was occurring at school. She also felt that this data-depiction of learning could demonstrate the effort that she makes to adapt her practice to students' needs.

*This bilingual class started in 1999. I have always put kids in their own level so that they can cope and I bring them up to speed with their peers. I think of what I can do to bring them up and I think of their needs as second-language learners of English. For some kids, I use their first language, Samoan, for literacy and then bring their English up. This is me being a teacher bringing things that were successful for me as a second-language learner of English and putting them into this classroom full of Samoan and Tongan kids. I have in-depth discussions in Samoan so they have an understanding of what the story is about and then I build up their English vocabulary around that story. The National Standards are saying as a certain five-year-old you are supposed to be doing this and that but these kids did not even know what an adjective or verb were. I teach all the parts of speech separately so that kids know their place in the English language and in their writing and because of that they are successful.*

Despite finding the National Standards policy a useful way to communicate learning progress, she also pointed out that this policy had unrealistic expectations for students who spoke English as an additional language. Applying generalised expectations through National

Standards limited her ability to show that her students were progressing and learning differently. When she believed that the standards were unrealistic, she relied on her practical knowledge and experience as a teacher and second language English learner.

*As a teacher in a Samoan bilingual class, there are lots of changes that come my way because I have year four to eight. There is a lot of inquiry into kids' learning and data to be collected to see where children are at. Even though these kids are in year four to eight, they still come in at their levels. A year eight does not necessarily mean that they are not performing as a year four. I do not see it as good practice to put a year four and a year eight together in a reading group. Those are the inquiries that I do in little bits and pieces.*

*When I have all the data in front of me, I think of how I would arrange learning for such a wide range of levels. This was the first inquiry I did for the multiple levels and ages in my class. I read multi-level teaching and bilingual education to match up our curriculum and best practice for me. Some of my year eights were performing well below the National Standards at the beginning of this year. I got them into a group by themselves and they did the same thing as the year fours but they stayed in their own group because it empowered them as year eights. At the end of the year, they were on level and loving learning. I try my best to get these kids to achieve at their chronological age.*

It was obvious that she made a concerted effort to incorporate National Standards expectations in her practice. She found the age-delimited expectations in the National Standards policy useful to differentiate between the different learning levels in her multi-aged classroom. Prior to the National Standards policy, she used an individualised teaching approach to manage her students by their own ability and age. Upon the introduction of the

policy, she used the standards to set formal expectations of learning and to gauge learning progress. When used in this manner, the standards enriched her understanding of individual learning progress.

*It has been a challenge but I did not know that I was doing this teacher inquiry for years because it has become second skin. I love being a teacher of Samoan kids and I am proud of what I do for these kids. I love being a Samoan and I do not know how not to be a Samoan. I bring in that Samoan nest of family values and respect. The kids in my class are very respectful of their environment, the people around them and me. I teach them how to be respectful and we show that when we do our school work, our learning.*

*A teacher back home is the most revered person in the village because you are up there next to the minister of church. People give teachers a lot of respect and they have a lot of “mana” (honour) in the village. The parents in my school think a lot of teachers, especially island teachers. I have a fantastic relationship with parents and I go to their homes. A lot of parents do not get a call from the school until the child is in trouble but I go there even when the child is reading well. I think my values as a Samoan play a big part in me being a teacher and they are in the background of my teacher inquiry because without that, I do not think I would be a very successful teacher.*

Her teaching identity and practice were deeply rooted in her cultural practices, values and beliefs. During our conversation, we spent an extensive amount of time discussing how her cultural beliefs shape the deep bonds she forms with her students. These bonds provide her with a strong understanding of their learning needs and background.

### *Finding a Suitable Lens*

I chose to explore Tammy's story through a cultural lens because she did not explicitly express teacher inquiry to be a form of teacher learning even though it was evident to me how she had learnt and changed her practice based on her inquiries. She described inquiry as a way of teaching and may have construed professional learning as an embedded part of teaching. This stance made her professional learning moments less clear because she tended to derive these moments from student learning stories. This lack of focus on her professional learning made me curious about how she conceptualised the purpose of learning and teaching.

I believe that Tammy conceived formalised teacher inquiry as a necessity because it demonstrated her professional accountability. Since she conceptualised informal teacher inquiry as an inherent part of her practice, she found it irrelevant to change the way that she inquired for formal inquiries. I found this to be intriguing because it indicated that she found it necessary to conduct two kinds of inquiry. Informal inquiries were conducted for personal reasons and focussed on the needs of all students while formal inquiries were conducted to demonstrate teaching accountability and focused on the needs of a small group of students. Even though it was not mentioned, these differences might indicate that she felt that informal inquiries were more realistic because she inquired into the needs of all students rather than a selective group of students.

Despite her uptake of formalised teacher inquiry, she tended to refer to formal inquiries as a way to justify her teaching practice to others. Perhaps this is because she construed formal inquiry to be an externally-motivated initiative. She rationalised that the increased use of assessment data to represent student learning was justified because it provided others such as parents or school leaders with a better picture of student learning and her teaching practice.

This external motivation was obvious in the way that she depicted formal inquiries to be “important” for “some people” who needed to evaluate her teaching from a “National Standards perspective”.

Her story challenged me because it required me to think of how she may have conceptualised teacher inquiry to be more than a form of teacher learning. This got me interested in her personal and professional motivations to teach and inquire. When I focused on the cultural values and beliefs that undergirded her motivations, I began to consider how a culturally-sensitive lens could change my interpretation of her experience.

Examining her experience through a culturally-sensitive lens made me see the importance that she attached to being a Samoan teacher and how this identity could have affected her conceptualisation of professional accountability. This was evident when she said, “I do not know how to not be a Samoan” and “my values as a Samoan play a big part in me being a teacher”. It showed me that being Samoan was a part of her teaching identity. When I considered these connections, I decided that I needed to understand what being a Samoan teacher may have meant to her and how this identity could have influenced the way that she conceptualised teacher inquiry.

Her identity as a Samoan teacher may have influenced the emphasis that she placed on academic success because she seemed to be very determined to support and help her students achieve. In addition to ensuring academic achievement, she also spoke about her cultural motivations for teaching. She stated that an important part of being a Samoan teacher is about spreading the Samoan culture. She felt an immense sense of pride and responsibility to teach her students about the importance of being a Pasifika because this identity may influence their “well-being, sense of belonging, identity and culture” (Tongati‘o, 2010, p. 10). To her, teaching was a way to impart cultural practices, values and beliefs. She was committed to

teaching her students about their ancestry and heritage. Her strong sense of culture left an impression on me and ultimately led to this culturally-infused interpretation of her experience.

Teachers in New Zealand are accountable to multiple stakeholders such as students, parents, school leadership, the local community and external organisations such as the Ministry of Education, the Education Review Office and the Educational Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (professional teacher body). While acceptance of formalised teacher inquiry fulfilled her professional obligations to the latter mentioned bodies, her willingness may have stemmed from her sense of responsibility as a Samoan teacher. The cultural links in her story led me to conclude that she carried a culturally-conceived sense of responsibility towards students, parents and the local Samoan community. Exploring her sense of accountability from a Samoan perspective may generate a deeper appreciation of how culture plays a role in teacher uptake of educational policies. In the following discussion, I explore a Samoan perspective of teacher accountability.

#### *A Samoan-sense of Teaching*

When people identify themselves through a cultural identity, they demonstrate a sense of pride and belonging to a particular culture. This connection affects how people conceive themselves, their values, practices and beliefs. For Samoans, this identity is conceptualised through “fa’asamoa” or a Samoan way of living (Tuisuga, 2009, p. 102). This way of being is ingrained into how Samoans perceive the world because it is a philosophy that influences their thoughts, actions and motivations.

Samoans are of Polynesian origins. New Zealand is part of Polynesia, which consists of a group of islands located in central and southern Pacific Ocean. The peoples from these islands have their own distinct culture, practice and language. The term Pasifika is commonly



in New Zealand to describe this group of diverse peoples. The Ministry of Education uses the term “Pasifika peoples” to represent people who identify themselves as “being Pacific” (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006, p. 1). Thus, Samoans see themselves as Pasifika too. This means that Pasifika models that have been developed in research literature can be used to interpret Samoan culture.

I found the “Pou Tu” model that Tanya Wendt Samu developed for Pasifika research a helpful framework to understand “fa’asamoa”. The “Pou Tu” model (as cited in Podmore, Wendt Samu, & The A’oga Fa’a Samoa, 2006, p. 38) was conceptualised to represent Pasifika values. This model used the architecture of the “fale tele”, a round guest house that is quintessentially Samoan (UNESCO Office For The Pacific States, 1992, p. 6), to symbolically represent the core values underpinning “fa’asamoa”. The three “main posts (pou tu)” form the “cornerstone” of the “fale tele” (UNESCO Office For The Pacific States, 1992, p. 30). These posts serve as the central pillars that uphold the structure. These pillars symbolically represent the core values of Samoan culture. The three pillars are “tautua (service and responsibility), alofa (love and commitment) and fa’aaloalo (respect)” (Podmore et al., 2006, p. 38). I borrowed these broad concepts to explore how “fa’asamoa” could have influenced Tammy’s sense of professionalism as a teacher and her attitude towards teacher inquiry.

Throughout our conversation, Tammy spoke with a lot of “alofa (love and commitment)” for teaching and her students. These moments were examples of the “alofa” that underpinned her passion for teaching. Her sense of “alofa” might have motivated her to treat her students as individuals with their own pace and trajectory of learning. As a Samoan teacher, she believed that she needed to be a strong, visible and positive influence on her students’ learning habits and understanding of education. It made her committed to their learning progress and prompted her to inquire regularly into their needs.

She described inquiry to be an ingrained part of her practice because she inquired to understand her students' individual needs. Since she mentioned that formal teacher inquiries required more "recordings" and "paperwork", it could indicate that she placed less emphasis on visible forms of data in her informal inquiries. The heightened need for assessment data in formal inquiries might have led her to conclude that assessment data could play a bigger role in representing student learning. It made her more cognisant of using assessment data to gauge learning progress. She found that a closer analysis of assessment data could help her evaluate the impact of her practice on student learning. As such, she concluded that combining her informal and formal inquiries would enable her to be a more effective teacher.

Being effective is an important part of Tammy's teaching identity. This need is linked to how she conceived her status and responsibility as a Samoan teacher. In addition to school leaders, and the Ministry of Education, she felt a sense of responsibility to her students, parents and the local Samoan community. She attached great importance to showing parents that their children were progressing academically. This helped me to perceive why her sense of responsibility was closely linked to student achievement. When she shows learning progress in terms of student achievement, it gives her the ability to demonstrate that she has taken responsibility for her students. However, it was unclear if this was an implicit expectation she placed on herself or something she perceived from parents or other people. I also wondered if her burden of responsibility was connected to a sense of "tautua (service and responsibility)" as a teacher.

As a teacher, "tautua" could be construed as working for the best interests of students. When "tautua" is loosely translated as "stewardship", it means that Samoans often place the "interests and well-being of others" before their own (Autagavaia, 2001, p. 80). I think that "tautua" was an inherent part of Tammy's identity as a Samoan teacher. Her stories about teaching difficult students gave me the impression that she placed the interests of others

before her own. These stories often contained vivid examples of how she went to great lengths to find ways of ensuring that her students were successful at school.

When I thought about “tautua”, I also wondered if her strong sense of stewardship could have influenced her to value student learning above her own professional learning. For example, when she spoke about formal inquiries, she felt a need to justify the increased recordings and paperwork by stating that these actions made her teaching efforts more transparent to others. When she described the changes to her practice, these were in reference to accommodating the particular needs of students. She placed little emphasis on the professional learning that she engaged in to make these changes possible. This made it appear that she valued these changes because it made a difference to her students and allowed her to fulfil her responsibility as a teacher.

When “tautua” is construed as a responsibility, it implies that teachers teach to be of service to others. This was obvious in her story because she held herself accountable to her students, parents and the Samoan community. Thus, taking responsibility for student learning was a personal and professional expectation she placed on herself. I construed this expectation as a tacit, implicit and culturally-motivated sense of accountability. This responsibility may be linked to Pasifika parents’ view of teachers’ roles in education. Tammy stated that her parents placed an immense level of trust in her as a teacher. They gave her a lot of *mana* or honour because they regarded teachers as important and respected pillars of society. Spiller (2012) described this respect as the “faith” Pasifika parents have in teachers to be trained professionals, who have their children’s best interest at heart (p. 64). This implicit expectation means that parents will often defer to teachers for educational decisions. It also means that they expect teachers to shoulder most of the responsibility for their children’s learning.

This cultural perspective of parents' expectations made Tammy's receptive attitude towards assessment data and data-based representations of student learning clearer. She found that her formal inquiries made it easier to show learning progress through assessment data. Since she kept close relationships with student parents, she believed that using data could help her to keep parents more engaged and involved in their children's education. I believe that the close contact she had with parents was a form of "fa'aaloalo (respect)" for parents. For example, in her formal teacher inquiry, she used assessment data and National Standards levels to discuss how her students were achieving academically. Since the Ministry of Education (2009b) promotes the National Standards policy as a tool that captures aspired trajectories of student learning, they claimed that these levels could improve how parents understood their children's learning progress. I think that Tammy subscribed to this perception too.

Tammy also recounted with great pride how her year eight students had progressed from performing "well below" National Standards levels at the beginning of the year to being "on level" at the end of the year. She found it advantageous to gauge learning progress through learning achievement or National Standard levels because this representation of learning provided a more visible picture of learning to students, parents and school leaders. She used the National Standard levels as useful benchmarks to gauge and represent learning progress because they allowed her to depict the varying levels of learning in her multi-aged classroom. This depiction was important to Tammy because she wanted to keep parents abreast of their children's learning achievements. Since she made it a priority to seek different ways to represent student learning progress, I wondered if this emphasis on communication was a form of "fa'aaloalo (respect)" for parents.

Tammy's sense of respect for other Samoans was apparent in the way that she viewed herself as part of the local Samoan community. An important part of being Samoan is about being connected to other Samoans because Samoans are known to be "relational beings"

(Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, & Bush, 2005, p. 303). As “relational beings”, Samoans nurture the “*va* [relationship]” they share with others through reciprocity and respect for others (Anae, 2010, p. 2). This means that teaching can be viewed as a way to nurture the “*va*” with others. If so, this affects how she may have conceptualised her responsibilities and image as a teacher. It can potentially explain why she construed learning achievement to be one of the most important goals for her as a teacher. To nurture the “*va*” with others meant that she needed to take responsibility for student progress and to communicate this progress to parents. These emphases may have influenced her conceptualisation of formal teacher inquiry.

I see Tammy’s position as a Samoan teacher as a means for her to foster the “*va fealoaloa’i*”. The “*va fealoaloa’i*” can be viewed as the act of “maintaining the sacred space within relationships” (Autagavaia, 2001, p. 77). As a Samoan teacher, she may have felt like a conduit between students, parents and the Samoan community. There were many moments during our conversation where I felt that her practice and sense of self demonstrated “*tautua* (service and responsibility), *alofa* (love and commitment) and *fa’aaloalo* (respect)” to her students, parents and the larger community. These values captured her genuine desire to establish and maintain good relationships with all of them. As such, I believe that she applied a “*va fealoaloa’i*” approach to teaching. This could explain her increased emphasis on showing and communicating learning progress. I believe that she valued informal and formal teacher inquiries because she focused on her students and their learning needs in informal inquiries while formal inquiries enabled her to explain her teaching actions to parents and school leaders in terms of student learning impact.

Exploring “*fa’asamoa*” through the “*Pou Tu*” model provoked me to imagine Tammy’s experience with teacher inquiry differently. This view extended my understanding of her sense of identity and accountability, and it gave me a culturally-sensitive interpretation of

how she could have construed the purpose of formal and informal teacher inquiries. The central values of love and commitment, service and responsibility, and respect, gave me a deeper appreciation of why she inquired informally and formally into her practice. This culturally-infused discussion enabled me to discuss how a Samoan-sense of teacher accountability could have influenced Tammy's uptake of teacher inquiry. It also depicts the possibility that culture plays an important role in teaching identities, practice and sense of professionalism.

## **Laurie – Conceptualising Inquiry**

I met Laurie through a doctoral acquaintance. I remember her distinctly because she was the only teacher who sent me her research consent by mail. She was a seasoned teacher who had just returned to New Zealand from teaching overseas and when we met, she was working as a full-time primary teacher. Prior to her departure, she worked as a teaching deputy-principal. She was very welcoming and her classroom was filled with numerous examples of student work on walls, hanging lines and shelves.

We spoke for approximately sixty minutes but for me, it was a difficult interview because I struggled to build rapport with her. I think this shook my confidence and affected my interpretation of her voice, body language and facial expressions. My uncertainty caused me to tread cautiously when I made comments or asked for clarification. Due to my own conflicted feelings, I did not feel comfortable asking too many probing questions. Generally, she gave me the impression that she was open and honest about her experience. She appeared to have a high-level of self-awareness of her practice and the educational landscape.

She shared two ways to conceptualise teacher inquiry. One was a teaching approach that closely resembled the “teaching as inquiry” cycle while the other was a form of teacher accountability that she referred to as formalised teacher inquiry. When she spoke about teacher inquiry as a teaching approach, she described how she inquired naturally as a teacher to understand the needs of her students. This purpose changed when she spoke about formalised teacher inquiries that she conducted to satisfy teaching regulations. These inquiries contained a stronger impositional tone and hinted at contrived efforts to document the teaching process and its outcomes. She also questioned the purported reasons for formalising teacher inquiry and the long-term ramifications of documenting teacher work.

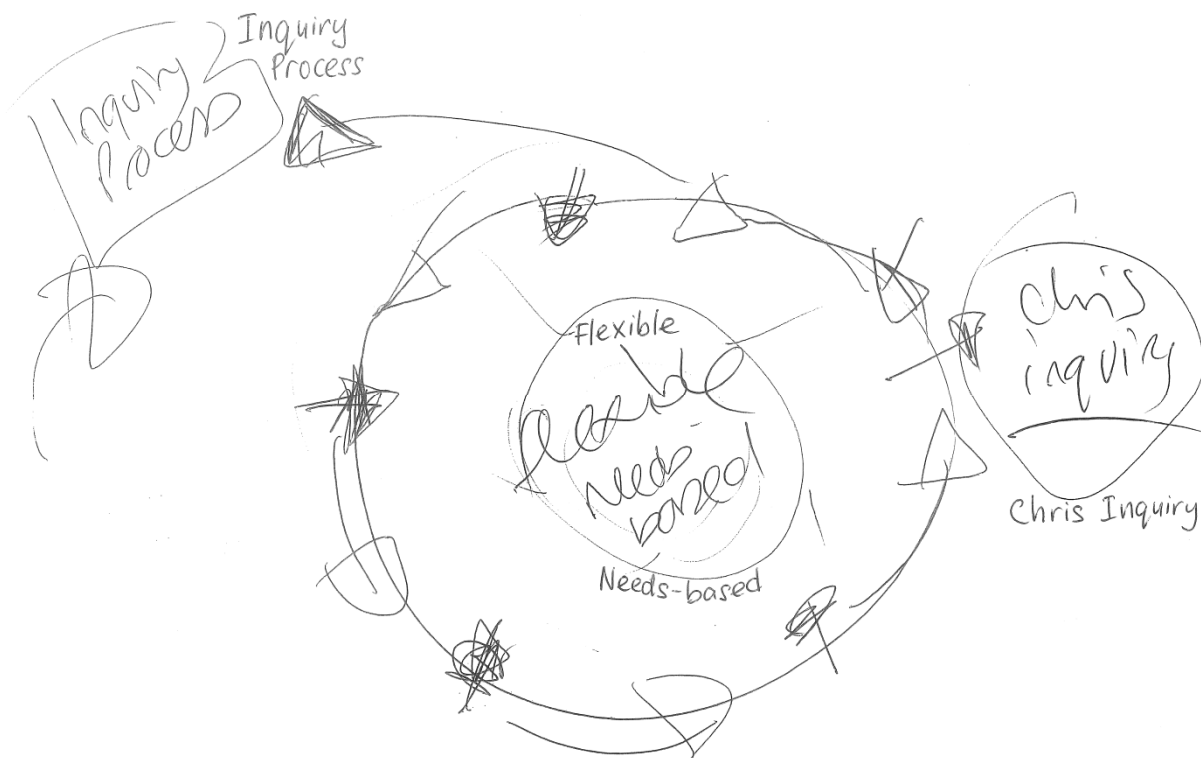
## *Conceptualising Teacher Inquiry*

*When I started teaching, I had not heard the term “inquiry” but I had people I called my “independent learners” because they did inquiry. It was my natural way as a teacher and my way to meet the needs of my class. The “teaching as inquiry” cycle shows the process that children do when they do inquiry. They go through various stages and go back to the evaluation stage all the time. “Teaching as inquiry” is cyclical and allows ways in, for things to happen within your teaching cycle because it responds to real time. These arrows are places where people can come in, things can change and you go according to needs but allow new things to happen within the cycle. Reality is messy and you have got to be open to everything coming in at different times and going all over the place. It is flexible, needs-based and it leaves space for children to explore and do their own inquiry.*

Laurie believed that inquiry was an embedded part of teaching. She inquired to be responsive to her students and to be aware of other factors that may affect her teaching practice. To her, the “teaching as inquiry” cycle is a graphical representation of what happens in teaching. She drew the illustration in Figure 1 below as she reflected on her “teaching as inquiry” cycle.

The unshaded arrows represented the phases of inquiry. She described these phases as paying attention to students’ needs, planning for their learning, addressing their needs and reflecting on how her actions affected her students. I noted that the unshaded arrows were cyclical and did not appear to have an exit point. She used this illustration to explain that she was an inquiring teacher because it showed how she promoted inquiry-driven learning and teaching in her classroom.





*Figure 1. Laurie's illustration of the "teaching as inquiry" cycle.*

At the heart of her illustration, she wrote the words, "flexible" and "needs-based", and stressed that these two elements undergirded her inquiries. Towards the right, she drew an exit arrow for "Chris's inquiry", which was an example of a student inquiry. The exit arrow showed that she was attuned to Chris's inquiry needs as she inquired as a teacher. She believed that teachers and students inquired continuously in learning and teaching. This meant that she maintained an ongoing awareness of how her students conducted their own inquiries during her inquiry into their learning.

In addition to Chris's exit arrow, she drew several shaded arrows to show how external factors could affect her inquiry. These arrows represented external elements such as changes to students' needs or unexpected changes to her teaching plans or routine. She drew these shaded arrows to exemplify how external factors could interrupt or influence the flow of inquiry, teaching and student learning. These arrows represented the messiness of teaching realities.

Her illustration of “teaching as inquiry” differed from the diagram that was published in the New Zealand Curriculum. The Ministry diagram is shown below in Figure 2 (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35). Even though both “teaching as inquiry” cycles captured the “moment by moment” elements of teaching (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35), they portrayed the inquiry process and focus differently.

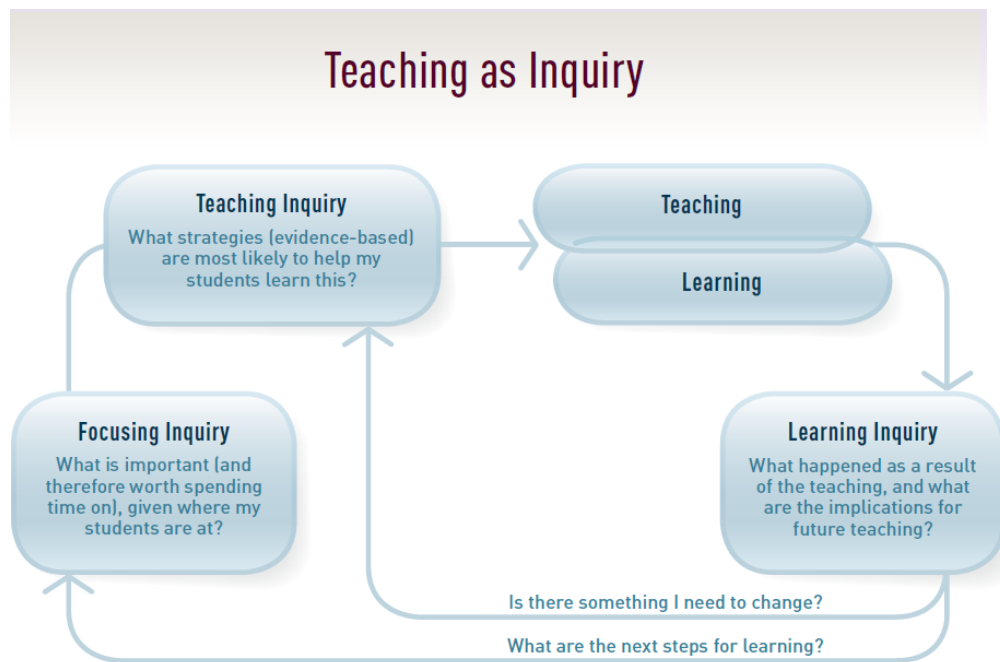


Figure 2. The “teaching as inquiry” cycle (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35).

There were some similarities because both promoted teacher inquiry as a way for teachers to inquire into the needs of their students and the impact of their teaching actions. When she described her personal motivation for evaluating the impact of her teaching actions in terms of student learning, she associated it with a need to understand her students. In contrast, she felt that the formal motivation for evaluating teaching impact was to hold teachers more accountable for their teaching actions. To her, this change might convince teachers to focus on the effectiveness of their methods rather than student learning. This evaluation on teaching impact differed when she inquire informally because she believed that her focus on was

student learning rather than teaching impact. To her, ensuring learning was more important than assessing the outcomes of learning.

There are two differences between Laurie and the Ministry's inquiry cycles. First, Laurie does not mention the use of "evidence-based" strategies in her practice even though she stated that read widely to support her practice. Secondly, she did not include her own learning as a teacher in her "teaching as inquiry" cycle. This teacher learning focus was mentioned in the "learning inquiry" phase of the Ministry's cycle but her lack of focus on teacher learning may indicate that Laurie did not view "teaching as inquiry" as a form of teacher learning.

*Things begin because you are told you have got to do a teacher inquiry from leadership. To be fair, it is something that you would do for appraisals anyway. We look at what our class needs are from our class descriptions or what we know or goals that we have not met. We write down what we are going to do, how we are going to do it, how we are going to collect the data, and what PD [professional development] or resources we will need or what we are going to do in order to achieve our ends. Then I would get the PD or resources, do the research, gather the data, and work out my class needs or my own needs as a teacher. It goes along in steps of reflecting, gathering data, analysing and reflecting again.*

*You think, "Is that doable? Is that measurable? Is that something I am going to be able to achieve?" Then you go around and around and it becomes more like a cone. You go back to reflect, check, and go in and out all the time because you might have kids going backwards so you might have to rethink and go backwards. It is cyclical but there is an end-point because your teacher inquiry comes to an actual end. To me, it would be like a "koru [Māori word for loop]" coming around like that and the dot at the center is the end-point. The progress for both you and the kid are reflected in*

*your written report on how it went and how you checked on it all the way. You go to your principal with the typed up data and examples. They will have a look at what you have done and how much of that relates to your job description. Over the last few years what we do as teachers has been labelled as teacher inquiry but we have always reflected on what we are doing, looking at where kids are at, where they need to go to next and we adjusted our practice. Putting it down on paper and formalising it just focuses you on specific needs in the classroom.*

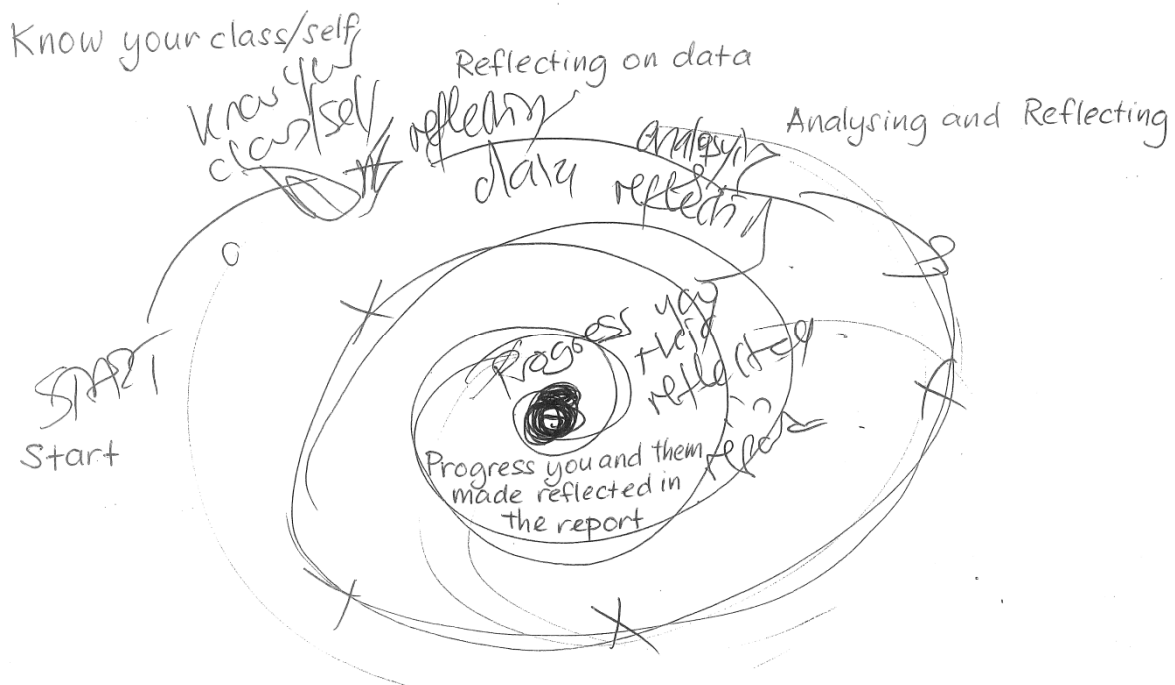


Figure 3. Laurie's illustration of a "teacher inquiry" cycle.

I was surprised at how clearly she articulated the differences between the "teacher inquiry" and "teaching as inquiry" cycles. As she drew the "teacher inquiry" cycle in Figure 3, she asserted how "teacher inquiry" was a formal expectation imposed upon teachers. When she designated an "achievable" tone to her formal inquiries, it made me question if this meant that her inquiries had to always be achievable. Perhaps that is why she construed the "teaching as inquiry" cycle to occur naturally during teaching whilst the "teacher inquiry"

cycle was contrived for administrative and managerial purposes. This could have been connected to the definitive starting and ending points of her formal inquiries, which carried a strong sense of formality.

She marked the structured phases within the formal inquiry process with an “x”. The focus on “achievable” learning improvements was evident in these phases because she went backwards to ensure that these learning improvements were targeted and fulfilled by the end of her inquiry. It was unclear what would happen when teachers were unable to show learning improvements in their formal inquiries.

Even though the phases within the “teacher inquiry” cycle loosely resembled her “teaching as inquiry” phases, she made it clear that formal teacher inquiries were an imposition. For example, she characterised her “teacher inquiry” as a yearly project that she was legally obliged to complete as a teacher. This project was a form of teacher accountability to school leaders and to the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand. She believed that it represented an attempt to formally document teacher work and teaching performance. Even though she pointed out connections between her “teacher inquiry” and professional development, the benefit that she could have derived from professional development was diminished.

Since Laurie experienced formalised teacher inquiry at different schools, I wondered if her conceptualisation of formal inquiry could have been influenced by different school-based implementations of teacher inquiry. The way that she conceptualised teacher inquiry gave me the impression that she inquired formally to fulfil a superficial sense of purpose. I think that her description of teacher inquiry resembled the “one-off action research project” that the Education Review Office (2012c) had cautioned against. To counter this, they recommended establishing teacher inquiry in a “systematic and continuous manner” (Education Review

Office, 2012c, p. 9). The Education Review Office (2012c) encouraged school leaders to integrate teacher inquiry into their school systems to encourage teachers to treat teacher inquiry as a thinking tool rather than a form of compliance.

*Last year we worked with another teacher who did not do the same inquiry but we did a mentoring thing. I was paired up and this teacher would ask me a lot of questions about my inquiry, really good coaching questions such as “What are you doing? Where are you going? Have you tried this kind of stuff before?” We would meet and reflect on it. Then I would do the same for another teacher and go through that whole coaching model which was cool.*

*This year we did two things. We did our own individual inquiries but we also did a lot of PD with another teacher where we visited other classrooms. Mine was focused on writing so when I went into other classrooms. I wanted to see what people were doing in writing for any hints, ideas or cool things that I could do in my classroom. That is how we tied them together. I looked at some writing needs because the school target was writing. I had some low-level writers in the classroom. We had a lot of writing PD with experts coming in and I enjoyed that because there were some useful bits and pieces.*

In this part of her story, she explained why she chose to inquire into “low-level writers”. This focus was influenced by her school’s target area and the Education Review Office’s (2012c) suggestion for teacher inquiry to focus on priority students. The Education Review Office (2012a) promoted teacher inquiry that focused on priority students because they had a history of learning underachievement (p. 4). They explicitly encouraged teachers to inquire into the needs of these students because they believed that teacher inquiry could provide teachers with the opportunity to increase their attention and analysis of priority students’ learning needs.

She felt that formalised inquiries were attempts to show that teachers were making a concerted effort to make a difference to these students. Perhaps this is why she placed such a strong emphasis on demonstrating learning achievement and progress in her formal inquiry.

In both her inquiry cycles, she talked about “going backwards” to make sure that her students were progressing. When she went backwards in her “teaching as inquiry” cycle, she went backwards to ensure that she was supporting the learning needs of her students. This motivation shifted in her formal inquiries and it sounded as if she went backwards to ensure that her students were making visible or measurable learning progress. Perhaps the pressure to demonstrate that teaching had made an impact on student learning progress for priority students could have affected the way that she conceptualised the purpose of teacher inquiry.

Laurie described herself as a facilitator of learning who inquired to create learning opportunities for her students. She believed in encouraging her students to learn and inquire at their own pace. Perhaps she understood learning as a “complex biological-and-experiential” process that occurs when there is an internal transformation (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 13). Through this view, learning occurs with or without “external stimulus” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 13). There were moments in her story when I felt that she adopted this view of learning because she believed that it was more important for her to teach her students how to learn rather than focus on measuring their learning progress. As such, she also questioned the purpose of measuring and tracking learning progress in formal inquiries.

Her desire to enable her students to learn at their own pace is connected to a “long-standing emphasis in New Zealand education” where students have been given leeway to pursue “their own trajectories” of learning (Wylie, 2012b, p. 203). This approach may have been challenged when she had to demonstrate student learning progress in her formal inquiry, which could have led her to feel conflicted about her personal teaching beliefs and

philosophies. Perhaps these conflicts also diminished the professional learning experiences that she had through formal inquiry, such as increased collaboration and professional development courses or workshops.

*I thought I was quite inventive but this showed me that I was not as good as I thought I was. It made me think up new and different ways to do things and I became more kinaesthetic with these writers. It made me push the proper writing that we had to do to fit with our inquiries. I did short bursts of fun writing because these kids do not necessarily like to write screens and screens of stuff. We would look at video clips of something really neat, like a guy who can skateboard like crazy or really interesting creepy crawlies and do little bursts of writing. I would tell them to write down the first thing that comes into their heads. After a page of writing I would ask them to pick adjectives or adverbs to put together little poems and pictures. These little things encouraged them and it was about getting mileage out of their writing. Then I looked at the data and analysed that carefully. They had good ideas but it was grammar and spelling that were the pullbacks so having that data and focusing clearly on what it was that they needed was good. There were some who could not hear sounds so they could not spell. I looked at where they were at and changed spelling tests into pseudo word testing, different types of writing, and letter sounds.*

Her formal teacher inquiry gave her the impetus to examine her writing practice critically. She extended her existing repertoire by exploring and experimenting with new ideas and methods. Since her formal teacher inquiry demanded a heightened focus on particular students, she found herself studying their needs more closely and making constant adjustments in her practice to suit their needs. She interpreted this level of attention and detail to a smaller group of students to be different from the habitual inquiries she conducted on students.



*Formalisation just started but ever since I started teaching I have been inquiring. I have always done it right down to the data because I do not believe you can teach effectively unless you are focused on what it is that they need or you are focused on what you need in order to be an effective teacher for them. It might look as if I am testing a lot but it is just data that I collect as I go. I believe that by doing that I can see better where they need to go next.*

*In formalised teacher inquiry, you have got your pedagogy, research, your targeted needs, targeted teaching to those needs and you collect data as you go. You can ask children, "Does your teacher help you? What do you think you have improved on this year?" but I do not know how you would know how much they learnt. My students made progress ultimately but I still do not think that I added value because I think they would have probably made that progress anyway. They were quite behind learners so you would need to follow them as a cohort for another little while to see how they go. It is hard to tell how much they would have improved and how much if anything you added. If nothing else, it focuses your attention on them and it makes sure you are doing learning activities with them. Then you have evidence to back up what you have done because you have data to say, "This is how much they have moved." Whether it is down to you or not, I do not know.*

I wondered if there was a difference between the data she collected for her informal and formal inquiries since she mentioned a habit of collecting data. In her informal inquiries, she would have used assessment data to inform her practice and comprehension of her students' learning needs but in formal inquiries, there is more pressure to use data to portray learning progress. Perhaps this pressure also conflicted with her belief that learning is an ongoing process. Thus, despite amassing assessment data that showed her students making progress,

she was dubious that their learning progress could be directly attributed to her teaching actions.

Her view of learning challenged me to imagine the learning process differently. Davis and Sumara (2007) conjectured that learning could be envisioned as an internal “structural change” that occurs within students’ “coherent but ever-evolving structure” (p. 59). This view helps to explain why Laurie might have felt that there were unexplored factors that could have contributed to her students’ learning progress other than her teaching actions. Since these factors occur internally, it implies that external stimuli do not necessarily cause learning to happen.

As a learning facilitator, she believed that teachers have intellectual and supportive roles in student learning. Teachers provide their students with opportunities that can stimulate rather than cause their learning. Thus, teachers play vital roles as facilitators because they can encourage their students to take risks in their learning. They guide and provoke their students to venture into “unimagined and not-yet-imaginable” realms (Davis & Sumara, 2007, p. 64). This view of learning and teaching defines education as an uncertain, “broadening” process (Davis & Sumara, 2007, p. 64). In this vision, learning occurs because of internal structural changes that may or may not be caused by teachers. This view supports Laurie’s belief that teaching is a process of facilitation.

*Even if you look at them historically to track their progress in years, it does not mean anything because one year from now everything could click into place. It will go, “Bang!” and they could be great but there is value in it because you are focused, collecting data and making sure that child is getting what they need. I am more than happy to do it because it is natural to me but I do wonder, “How will I know?” when they talk about “value added this and that” and “What value are you adding to that*

*child's learning?" If they progressed a year, they should have done that but "Have you made them progress another six months or three months? How the heck would I know if these kids who are already years behind would have progressed a year? If they were progressing a year, should they not be where they are at by now?"*

Her view of learning caused her to question the idea of imagining learning to occur predictably because to her, learning was inherently an unpredictable process. I think this is why she described learning as a "bang" moment that occurred when students are suddenly able to magically grasp what they were meant to learn. Her description reminded me of how Levenson (1998) stated that learning occurred on an "unconscious" level (p. 247). He described these "ineffable" moments of learning as something that takes place when students experience the "'ah-hah' phenomenon" in learning (Levenson, 1998, p. 247). When learning is depicted as an unconscious process of understanding, it raises concerns about using assessment data to represent student learning progress.

*Formalised teacher inquiry is really about making and keeping us honest by focusing on children and not becoming too complacent. It keeps us remembering who we are doing this for so there is nothing wrong with it. From that point of view, it is good and I have got no objection to it. However, teacher inquiry worries me from a political perspective. By giving what we do as teachers a label, does that mean we are going to be paid according to how much our children have progressed now that we have got a formalised way of measuring it? It makes me suspicious because it is something that we have always done but now it is here on a piece of paper. The government may want to make teachers performance paid and this could be used that way even though it is a natural thing that we do.*

In this part of our conversation, she made me consider the political motivations and intentions that underpinned formalisation. Her views caused me to question the purpose of formal teacher inquiry. If teachers were professionals, then why would there be a need to keep teachers honest? Her questions about the government using formal teacher inquiry as documentation for teaching performance seem concerning. It made me wonder if she associated formal teacher inquiry with teacher performance because of the National Standards policy. I found that Lee and Lee (2015) also speculated that the National Standards policy was a concealed initiative to move towards measuring and remunerating teachers based on their performance (p. 132). Since the Ministry had linked formal teacher inquiry to the National Standards policy (2009b), I could see her grounds for questioning the formal intentions of the teacher inquiry movement. Since formalisation would generate documentation that could be used to justify teaching effectiveness, I could see cause for her concerns. When framed in this critical light, formalised teacher inquiry may well be a government initiative that uses student outcomes as a gauge of teacher performance.

### *Reasons to Inquire*

Although I felt slightly disconnected from Laurie during our conversation, I think she raised thought-provoking issues about formalised teacher inquiry. It made me consider if her hiatus from teaching in New Zealand had made her more aware of the changes in the educational landscape or perhaps, if her previous experience as a deputy principal would have made her more knowledgeable about educational policies.

When I reflected on her experience, I found her illustrations to be useful visual guides to understand her conceptualisation of teacher inquiry. I believe that she conceptualised inquiry to be an inherent part of her practice but this conceptualisation was challenged when teacher inquiry was formalised. This was apparent in the way that she distinguished between informal

and formal teacher inquiries. Since both were forms of teacher inquiry, they possessed similar phases. Perhaps she valued informal inquiries more because she had a clearer understanding of the purpose of inquiry whilst she questioned the purpose of formal inquiries. Interestingly, both her illustrations were unlike to the inquiry cycles that have been associated with formal teacher inquiry.

When she first discerned between “teaching as inquiry” and formal teacher inquiries, I expected her to make references to or draw the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle but this was not the case. While she acknowledged that formal teacher inquiry was a beneficial form of teacher learning, the strong impositional tone and increased emphasis on measurable student outcomes may have led her to construe teacher inquiry as a form of compliance rather than an opportunity to learn from practice.

It was unclear if Laurie had used the “teaching as inquiry” cycle published within the curriculum to guide her formal inquiries. However, it was clear that she used the phrase “formalised teacher inquiry” to demonstrate how this form of teacher inquiry represented a formal effort to explain how she inquired and learnt from her practice. These formal inquiries differed from her informal inquiries because she believed they were conducted to mainly satisfy administrative purposes. Even though she believed in the value of focusing on the learning of priority students, she questioned if their learning progress could be attributed to her teaching actions.

In their national survey, C. Wylie and L. Bonne (2014) reported that 70% of teachers were inquiring into their practices (p. 32). In their reports, the Education Review Office (2012c) found 72% (2011) and 58% (2012c) of schools had implemented varying levels of teacher inquiry. These reports affirm a strong occurrence and adoption of teacher inquiry in the schools. Even though she supported formal teacher inquiry, she questioned the underlying

purpose and motivation for formal teacher inquiry. This made me curious about the multiple ways that teachers can experience teacher inquiry. In the next section, I explore the inquiry cycles and models that have been used to promote teacher inquiry to see if these different conceptualisations could have contributed to her varied understanding of teacher inquiry.

### *The Teacher Inquiry Cycles*

The “teaching as inquiry” cycle was presented as a form of “effective pedagogy” in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35). In this cycle, teacher inquiry was described as a process that teachers could undertake to examine the impact of their teaching actions on student learning. This cycle outlined teacher inquiry as a continuous process of “focusing, teaching and learning inquiries” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35). These inquiries position teachers as central decision-makers in ensuring that teaching is a purposeful and informed act. In the “focusing” inquiry, teachers conduct formative assessments to gauge their students’ needs. These assessments provide teachers with “baseline” data for their inquiry (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35). Teachers use this baseline data to search for suitable teaching strategies in the teaching inquiry.

The Ministry of Education (2007) encouraged teachers to seek “evidence-based” strategies such as “evidence from research and from their own past practice and that of colleagues” (p. 35). There is evidence in Education Review Office (2012c) reports on teacher inquiry that shows that “only a small number of schools” and teachers were looking beyond their practices for evidence-based strategies (p. 25). The Education Review Office (2012c) persuaded teachers to view teacher inquiry as an opportunity to engage in “possibility thinking” (p. 25). They want teachers to inquire into new or different strategies because they believed that teachers were not meeting the needs of students.

In final “learning” inquiry, teachers evaluate if their actions have affected student learning. This evaluation can be construed as a summative evaluation of learning and teaching because it provides teachers with a picture of their teaching effectiveness, which is believed to make teachers more aware of the responsibility and impact that they have on student learning. These three cycles depict teaching as a process of inquiry.

From reports by the Education Review Office (2012c), the “teaching as inquiry” cycle published in the curriculum is the most commonly used cycle to guide teacher inquiry in schools (p. 6) . However, this “teaching as inquiry” cycle is based on the “teaching as inquiry” model published by Aitken and Sinnema (2008) within the Social Studies Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration.

The “teaching as inquiry” model was outlined as a “model of evidence-informed pedagogy” (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 53). Aitken and Sinnema (2008) envisioned teacher inquiry as a pedagogical mindset that can strengthen teaching practice through evidence-informed thinking and actions. Their model premised that teaching is a contextually-bound practice. They encouraged teachers to pay closer attention to learning outcomes that are connected to student interests and lives, and fostered through learning communities (Sinnema & Aitken, 2011, p. 34). Even though both versions of the “teaching as inquiry” cycle and model place teachers at the heart of the inquiry, the model seemed to place more emphasis on the teacher learning aspects of inquiry. This difference in teacher learning emphasis may lead to these two versions of “teaching as inquiry” to be implemented differently.

In the model, teachers are asked to consider formal learning expectations such as “curriculum requirements, community expectations” in relation to students’ “needs, interests and experiences” (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 52). This focus signals that the learning process is dependent on internal as well as external learning expectations. With this focus, teachers are

encouraged to seek teaching strategies that are supported by different forms of evidence.

Aitken and Sinnema (2008) advised teachers to be cognisant of how evidence can vary by the particular point of view or agenda supporting the strategy. This awareness shapes how teachers evaluate the impact of their teaching in the learning inquiry. In the model, the learning inquiry places an emphasis on interpreting the link between teaching actions and student learning. They asked teachers to explore the “what” and “why” angles when probing into the impact of teaching because this enables teachers to view effective teaching as a process of discovery (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 52). Their model established teacher inquiry as a teacher learning process that encourages teachers to extend their practice through purposeful exploration. This version of “teaching as inquiry” frames inquiry as a method that teachers can use to develop an informed approach to teaching.

To support their evidence-informed approach to teaching, Aitken and Sinnema (2008) outlined three key attitudes to support teacher inquiry: “open-mindedness, fallibility and persistence” (p. 53). When teachers inquire to go beyond their existing practices, they will need these attitudes to make inquiry a sustainable form of teacher learning. These attitudes might help teachers to conceptualise teacher inquiry in terms of possibilities. When teachers imagine teacher inquiry as a discovery process, it can transform how they teach and learn professionally.

These key attitudes and the focus on teacher learning possibilities were absent from the “teaching as inquiry” cycle. Without these characteristics, what remained was “an instrumental formula for teachers to follow” when they inquired (Benade, 2015, p. 116). In addition to portraying teacher inquiry as a decision-making cycle, the model also encouraged teachers to regard teacher inquiry as a discovery-driven teacher learning tool. For this reason, Sinnema and Aitken (2011) unequivocally distanced their model from the cycle. They believed that the emphasis on discovery and possibilities in their model exhibited a “post-



positivist approach” that emphasised knowledge in a “conjectural” light (Sinnema & Aitken, 2011, p. 32). They promoted teacher inquiry as an opportunity for teachers to evaluate and learn from their practice.

Formalised teacher inquiry has been associated with the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle. This cycle placed teachers at the forefront of education reform by emphasising the central roles that teachers can play in improvement agendas. Teacher inquiry is a teacher learning policy that promotes inquiry as a strategic way to address student learning needs.

Timperley et al. (2007) asserted that teacher learning initiatives can be made more relevant if they are determined by student needs. The assumption in this approach is that teacher learning can be customised to improve student learning. In this cycle, teacher inquiry is promoted as a form of teacher learning that could change the way that teachers construe their roles in education. It placed teachers in agentic and self-regulated learning roles to depict teacher learning as a means to improve student learning. Like the “teaching as inquiry” cycle and model, teaching is framed to have an impact of student learning but in this cycle, teaching is understood to have a collective impact on student learning.

To understand this collective impact on student learning, teachers inquire collaboratively into their practices and accept the idea that their practices may have contributed to the historical underperformance of particular student groups. It is believed that this acceptance could make teachers more aware of the responsibility that they carry for student learning and motivate them to become “agents of change” (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlv). This responsibility is founded upon a belief that quality teaching can have the “greatest system influence” on student learning (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 1). Therefore, when teachers accept their roles and responsibilities for student learning, they would embrace teacher learning agendas that

promote quality teaching. Timperley et al. (2007) also proposed that teacher inquiry needed the supportive structure of parallel inquiries. This would suggest that students and school leaders would conduct similar inquiries into their learning and practice.

In addition to these three cycles and models, formalised teacher inquiry has been linked to practitioner or teacher action research. C. Wylie and L. Bonne (2014) grouped “teaching as inquiry” with teacher action research in their national survey on primary and intermediate schools. The way that Laurie described formal teacher inquiry as a spiral process of reflecting, collecting and analysing data bore some resemblance to the basic action research cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

Since there is a tendency to use the terms “teacher action research” and “teacher inquiry” interchangeably (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009, p. 13), I thought about the likelihood that the cycles and models of inquiry had originated from an action-based approach to educational change. I understand teacher action research to be a form of teacher learning led by teachers. Thus, when teachers can autonomously shape their own teacher inquiry experiences, these inquiries can be considered to be similar to teacher action research. It would appear that the formalisation of teacher inquiry can be interpreted as an attempt to shift the autonomy in professional learning away from teachers. This shift in autonomy will be useful in efforts to implement systemic improvement efforts through teacher learning.

I began this exploration because I wanted to understand how Laurie could have arrived at her different conceptualisations of teacher inquiry. There is a possibility that these varied conceptualisations were influenced by the different cycles or models used to promote teacher inquiry. Additionally, since teacher inquiry is a situated form of teacher learning, the structure of its implementation is contingent upon the interpretations of school leaders.

I used this discussion to show that the purpose and focus within teacher inquiry can vary according to the cycle or model adopted. For example, the “teaching as inquiry” cycle encourages teachers to use teacher inquiry as a tool to assess the impact of their teaching. In addition to assessing the impact of teaching, the “teaching as inquiry” model promotes teacher inquiry as a way for teachers to enrich their practice with evidence-based strategies.

The teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle promotes both these aims by depicting teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning that can be determined by student needs. This cycle places more emphasis on professional learning while the others tend to allude to professional learning as a by-product of teaching actions. Despite this focus, the teacher learning outcomes from inquiry are still secondary in comparison to the emphasis that is placed upon the impact of teaching on student learning.

While it is understood that the ultimate aim within teacher learning and inquiry is to improve student learning, there may be a need for more opportunities within teacher inquiry to acknowledge the professional learning process that teachers experience. Such increased acknowledgement could give teachers increased space and time to make better sense of the professional learning that they experienced through inquiry. Perhaps a more supportive implementation of teacher inquiry could make it a more satisfying form of teacher learning and give teachers like Laurie more room to discuss some of the conflicts she experienced.

## **Winnie – Motivation**

I met Winnie through a doctoral acquaintance who was a professional learning and development facilitator. When we met, she was a teaching deputy-principal on secondment as a professional learning and development facilitator. As a facilitator, she worked with teachers and school leaders to implement teacher inquiry through the “teaching as inquiry” cycle (Ministry of Education, 2007). Based on my first impression of her, I thought that she was not very keen to participate in my study because she appeared to be hesitant. This impression contributed to the uncertain mindset I had at the start of our conversation. Despite my hesitations, she appeared to be honest and forthcoming with her thoughts on teacher inquiry. She even brought her laptop to show me inquiry-related documentation. This gave me the impression that she made a concerted effort to help me understand her experience. Our conversation lasted for approximately ninety minutes.

To Winnie, an inquiry mindset was a natural stance to teaching. She described inquiry as a mindset that enables teachers to monitor their students’ engagement and learning progress. This was the habitual inquiry stance that she believed she had towards teaching because she chose to believe that teachers were innate inquirers. For her, the inquiry process is cyclical because it involves continuous acts of observation, planning, experimentation and evaluation to ensure student learning. She believed that these acts motivated her to constantly do her best for her students.

She differentiated this habitual inquiry from the formalised version she had to conduct. To her, teacher inquiry becomes formal when the inquiry process is documented as evidence of teaching actions and tied to professional accountability. Although she appreciated that formalisation enabled her to share her knowledge with others, she was uncertain that formalisation could convince teachers to conduct meaningful inquiries. I think she based this

conclusion on her belief that teacher inquiry is driven by an instinctual teaching need to cater to students.

### *Making Sense of Teacher Inquiry*

*As a novice teacher, you inquire into everything you do because you are second guessing everything and you build that habit into teaching. It is the practice of effective practitioners because teaching is about students. You need to know something so you inquire into it. When I came out of teachers' college, I found that I did not know how to teach. I had to inquire into what I was doing all the time because I had to make progress for kids.*

*As a novice teacher with reading groups, I could group students and stop there instead of inquiring into why I was hopeless into what I needed to do to move them. It is never ending because this went well today but I am not happy with that. You do not focus on your positives and instead you focus on the one that did not go well today. It is constant thinking about practice. Teacher inquiry is what you do as a teacher because you cannot be effective without inquiring into your practice and students' learning constantly. It is a habit and disposition of effective teachers because you need to inquire into what you are doing to get a change of practice but it has got to be intrinsic.*

Her inquiry stance towards teaching became second nature for her when she adopted a responsive approach towards teaching challenges. This habituated mindset motivated her to continuously question her practice because she felt effective as a teacher when she focused on her students' needs. When her students' learning progressed, it validated her sense of efficacy. She believed that her intrinsic desire to be effective motivated her to inquire and change. I think that her experience with habitual inquiry and the experiences that she had

leading others to adopt an inquiry mindset may have led her to conclude that inquiry is intrinsically motivated. There were moments in her story when she alluded to encounters with teachers who were less receptive to the idea of formal teacher inquiry.

I perceived that her inquiring disposition was accompanied by what Rodgers (2002) described as an “impulse to reflect” (p. 850). The impulse to reflect causes teachers to pay closer attention to their actions in order to make sense of their experiences. This combination of inquiry and reflection became a habitual teaching mindset. She adopted this mindset after she experienced how it enabled her to feel more efficacious in her practice. Perhaps this was something that she wanted teachers to understand and experience when she was guiding them in their inquiries.

*I had a student who had such low confidence in herself and her Maths. She used to be a perfect echo you could hardly pick up because it was almost indiscernible. She would hear an answer and echo it so that you would think she had answered it. She was very clever because she had honed this skill for six years but had no confidence in herself as a Mathematician. I worked with the rest of the group to ensure that they recognised Sandy as a potential source of great Mathematical ideas. I looked at motivating language that I could use. I told her that it was good to work on things when she was wrong because misconception is actually great learning. This was a small example of a practical inquiry that I did not write but yet I was able to shift what was going on in my head. I go through this all of the time. You are busy teaching but you notice and question things. You cannot be in a classroom and not notice so you have to be inquiring to teach.*

In this example of a practical inquiry, she shared how her habituated way of questioning causes her to inquire into her students. Her thoughts disclosed a heightened sensitivity to

student behaviour as well as strong observational, assessment and empathic skills. During her inquiry, she remained cognisant of her student's feelings because she wanted to ensure that Sandy would benefit from the extra attention she had. She viewed herself as an effective teacher who conducted ongoing inquiries to help students succeed in their learning.

*Even in the informal way, your evidence is in your kids' achievement so you are constantly looking into that as a teacher. We do formal reports and assessments at the end of year, but within your class, you are working on a particular strand or genre of writing. When your kids are not showing progress, you reflect on if they are motivated to write and why. Evidence is part of your informal habit because you think of why things are not changing when you changed the way you introduced it. For example my kids hated writing and I had to think of what I could do to make them more motivated to write while doing specific genres that I wanted them to write about. I made motivation happen through blind tasting, observations of wildlife, and role-plays on stupid or funny things. The change in motivation was not evidence but the amount they produced in writing was the evidence.*

This cause-and-effect view of inquiry summed up her belief that her teaching has a direct impact on student learning. She used evidence as a form of feedback because it enabled her to understand the impact of her actions. It was important to collect different forms of evidence because this enabled her to scrutinise her practice from different angles. Her flexible approach made it easier to cater to her students' needs or preferences.

*When the 2007 curriculum was brought in, schools worked on creating their own closely-aligned version and "teaching as inquiry" was part of that. We have an appraisal connector system where we upload our reflective questions. These do not have immediate responses because they require deep thinking and actions to realise*

*them. Then we reflect and say how we used this stance, what was happening or not happening, and what we can do to influence what was not happening. At the end of the year, teachers have a conversation with the principal about what they have been working on or the shifts in practice that they have made as a result of their reflective question.*

*I do not put all of my inquiries up. So you focus on a couple to formalise and make big shifts but in reality you are doing it day by day. If something does not go well when you try something, you are not going to repeat it. You are going to change your practice and reflect on that change. You might have a conversation with a colleague about it or you might just have an internal reflection but there is no point just reflecting because it does not mean anything unless you action it. Inquiry on its own is nothing and must lead to action.*

She differentiated between her habitual and formalised teacher inquiry because the latter is externally motivated. Formal inquiries were documented for the purpose of accountability while habitual inquiries were informal inquiries because they occurred internally. Regardless of form, she believed that actioned change was the most important part of inquiry. This belief could have come from the learning materials she read as a professional learning and development facilitator.

In the “Ki te Aotūroa: Improving Inservice Teacher Educator Learning and Practice”, a guide published for teacher-learning facilitators, actioned change was defined in terms of “seen and measured” impact on student outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 149). This guide emphasised that teacher learning “must lead to change; that is, it must be enacted in practice and directed towards improvement” (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 149). These ideas could have influenced her stance on the purpose and meaning of formalised teacher inquiry.



*Formalising is ticking boxes but it has given us the language to discuss, support and share with each other. Sharing shifts in practice was more blurred in the past but formalisation has given me a formal evidence-base with some robustness and rigour around the informal process. Including it in the curriculum was a good idea because it is talked about. I think formalisation is a need to audit myself because as part of our attestation, you have to show that you are an effective teacher.*

*I worry about formalisation because you do not have to be an inquiring teacher to play the game. Your core job as a teacher is to plan and show evidence of student outcomes. An ineffective teacher could not fake it because they would not have the evidence to support it but an adequate teacher could. You do not want an adequate teacher in front of your child because you want an exceptional teacher. You want one that attempts to be the best that they can be given all the commitments they have. If you have that genuine disposition, you will be the best you can be but adequate teachers could be told to do it and could play the game of filling forms but that would not mean that their practice was improving. You cannot make someone inquire no matter how much formalising.*

She believed that formalisation created a professional platform for teachers to share their knowledge with others. She found this to be beneficial since formal inquiry generated opportunities for teachers to talk about their practice. Since formal teacher inquiry was also a sign of professional accountability, it requires teachers to demonstrate evidence of their inquiries. She was sceptical that this formal expectation could motivate teachers to change their practice. She described formal teacher inquiry as a “game” that teachers could learn how to play because they needed to satisfy accountability measures. I think she used the metaphor of game-playing to highlight the possibility of teachers conceptualising formal teacher inquiry as a form of compliance.

She asserted that teachers changed when they were intrinsically motivated to do their best for their students. I believe that she defined intrinsic motivation to stem from teachers' ethical and moral reasons to teach. She wondered if it was realistic to expect teachers to adopt inquiry as a professional "way of being" or a "habit of mind" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 43) when they were not intrinsically motivated to teach. She believed that effective teachers inquire because they are ethically and morally motivated to teach. This made me investigate how teachers' motivation to inquire, teach and learn professionally could affect the way that they conceptualise formal teacher inquiry.

### *Understanding Intrinsic Motivation*

Winnie's story highlighted that she differentiated between habitual and formal teacher inquiries. As a teacher, I could identify with her definition of inquiry as a natural and curiosity-driven approach to teaching. I interpreted this approach to be fuelled by ethical and moral motivations to teach because she used intrinsic motivation as a rationale for habitual inquiry. Since inquiry was already embedded in her practice, it was easy for her to subscribe to the idea of formal inquiry. Even though she defined formal teacher inquiry as an "audit", which signalled that formal teacher inquiry was an imposition, she saw the potential benefits of inquiring formally into her practice. For example, she valued the opportunity to collaborate and to share knowledge with others.

I found her thoughts on inquiry and intrinsic motivation intriguing. She talked about some teachers who were less unenthusiastic about formal inquiry and perhaps these encounters had led her to conclude that intrinsic motivation was a key ingredient in teacher inquiry. This made me think about what factors could influence teachers to inquire into their practice. The assumption underpinning formal teacher inquiry is that teachers are motivated to learn and change because teacher inquiry can help them to meet the needs of their students. Winnie

subscribed to this assumption by stating that it was teachers' intrinsic motivation that made them more likely to learn and change their practice. Perhaps she believed that the personal nature of intrinsic motivation could make teachers more determined to ensure that their actions had a positive impact on student learning.

Even though she differentiated between habitual and formal teacher inquiry, she believed that both stemmed from a desire to make sure that teaching contributed to student learning. I think that formal teacher inquiry was implemented because there was a perceived need to increase teachers' "sense of self responsibility for professional practice" (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 19). This sense of self-responsibility was outlined in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle.

In this teacher inquiry cycle, teachers accept responsibility for student learning and construct professional learning initiatives based on their needs (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlv). This approach portrays teacher learning as a viable way to optimise teacher learning initiatives. The authors proposed this cycle in an attempt to make teacher learning more efficient because the goal within teacher learning is to provide teachers with purposeful and realistic professional learning that they can incorporate into their practices, which can ultimately benefit students. While this streamlined approach may appear to expedite relevant teacher learning, customising teacher learning initiatives based on student needs could affect teachers' motivation to learn. This is the inherent challenge of using teacher learning and inquiry as a means to improve student learning. In the following discussion, I will examine some of the rationales that have been used to motivate teachers to inquire formally.

### *Motivations to Inquire*

Since teacher inquiry is a situated form of teacher learning that is implemented in schools by school leaders, teachers may experience different kinds of formal inquiries. Their experiences

are dependent upon how teacher inquiry is conceptualised and implemented at their schools. It can also vary according to the teacher inquiry cycle or model that is used to guide teachers during their inquiries. At Winnie's school, teachers used the "teaching as inquiry" cycle and she described formalised teacher inquiry as a way for teachers to study their practice in order to improve student learning. She was sceptical that formalising teacher inquiry could induce teachers to conduct honest and open examinations of their practices. This scepticism inspired me to explore the underlying motivation for formalising teacher inquiry.

The three teacher inquiry cycles and models used to promote teacher inquiry are underpinned by different purposes and motivations to inquire. The "teaching as inquiry" cycle depicted inquiry as a teaching strategy that teachers can use to plan, design and evaluate the impact of their actions. The "teaching as inquiry" model promoted these notions in addition to underscoring the importance of venturing beyond existing practices. The teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle placed an emphasis on the professional learning benefits of inquiry by encouraging teachers to view the inquiry process as a formal, collaborative opportunity to examine their deep-seated beliefs about teaching and learning.

All three approaches promote teacher learning differently. In the "teaching as inquiry" cycle, teachers learn within the "learning inquiry" by reflecting on the outcomes of their actions. This reflective intent is deepened in the "teaching as inquiry" model where teachers are asked to inquire into the "what" and "why" aspects of their actions. These emphases were intended to guide teachers to formulate deeper questions about their students, teaching aims, and context. When teachers develop these critical thinking and questioning skills, they could change "typical or habitual practices that may not be serving students well" (Sinnema & Aitken, 2011, p. 35). The "teaching as inquiry" model promoted "outcomes-linked research evidence" as a way to stimulate teachers to experiment with new teaching strategies or ideas (Sinnema & Aitken, 2011, p. 35). When Aitken and Sinnema (2008) envisioned teacher

inquiry as an informed teacher learning and reflective process that could strengthen teaching practice, they also proposed that teachers needed attitudes such as “open-mindedness, fallibility and persistence” to develop an inquiry-driven mindset to teaching (p. 53). They posited that these key attitudes could help teachers to learn about their practice in terms of possibilities.

These “teaching as inquiry” cycles and models present teacher inquiry as a practical process that teachers can use to study their practice, which highlights the benefits of a practice-based approach to teacher learning. The motivation to inquire and learn is clearly linked to improving the practicalities of teaching because teaching actions are perceived to be a means to improve student learning. As such, the underlying aim would be to examine and learn from practices that can make an impact on student learning. While this aim is embedded within all the cycles and models promoting teacher inquiry, the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle attempts to make teacher learning more effective by designing teacher learning based on student needs. In this cycle, teachers explore “existing teaching-learning links and the outcomes for students” (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xliv) to examine the collective effect of teaching. This cycle also promotes parallel student and school leader inquiries, which alludes to the notion of school-based inquiry cultures. In such an inquiry culture, teachers accept their collective responsibility for student learning and learn professionally to meet the needs of their students. This cycle is premised on the notion that teachers can be motivated to learn and apply their learning to their practice when their learning is driven by student needs.

In the same way as the “teaching as inquiry” model, the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle was published in the Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis programme that promoted quality teaching as a means to improve student learning. Underpinning these conceptualisations of teacher inquiry is the perceived need to change or improve existing patterns of practice that may contribute to the inequalities in educational outcomes. This

underpinning implies a move to make teachers more accountable for their teaching actions and their professional learning outcomes. The assumptions about teaching and learning that inform the teacher inquiry movement may challenge and change the way that teachers conceive and experience professional learning.

The teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle can be interpreted as a different form of teacher learning because it represents an attempt to motivate teachers to learn and change their practices based on student needs. This cycle established the notion that teacher learning could be strategically designed to suit student learning needs. The Education Review Office (2012c) called for school leaders to inquire into these “gaps in teachers’ practices” because they could be used to strengthen the teacher learning experience for teachers (p. 7). Through this approach, teachers would engage in teacher learning initiatives that were relevant to the skills and knowledge that they could use to improve student outcomes. While these notions propose a logical sequencing to the process of teacher learning, the purposeful linkages between teacher and student learning are still dependent on how teachers interpret, apply and enact their learning in practice.

Timperley et al. (2007) described this dependency as the “black box” of teacher learning. Teacher learning occurs in a black box because there is much that is not clear about how teachers learn and apply their learning to their practice. To decipher this opacity, Timperley et al. (2007) proposed that teacher learning could be imagined as a process where teachers reject or adopt new knowledge or skills according to how these fit into teachers’ existing states of mind and theories of practice. Their depiction of teacher learning as an act of adjustment aligns with the “*learning*” and “*unlearning*” processes Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) imagined. This process of negotiation occurs when teachers are confronted with new skills and knowledge that may challenge established practices, values and beliefs (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 597). Their view of teacher learning

acknowledges that teacher learning is dependent on teachers' prior knowledge, experience, and philosophies. While teacher learning is a professional act, it is also very much a personal process of learning.

In their work, Timperley et al. (2007) implied that teachers' motivation to learn is an inherent part of their sense of professionalism. This is reflected in the way they assumed that teachers were more likely to learn and change their practices when they experience professional learning that has a "strong impact on teaching practice and student outcomes" (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 29). I do not dispute this view of motivation or the implied responsibility that teachers have for student learning. However, I am concerned that associating teacher learning and inquiry with historical student performance may diminish the central aim within teacher inquiry, which is to provide teachers with professional learning opportunities that can improve student learning. While this situation may be urgent, there may be other compelling reasons or more persuasive ways to motivate teachers to learn and examine their practices.

When teacher inquiry is used to advocate for teacher learning, teachers are positioned at the heart of the learning process. Foregrounding the potential difference that teachers can make to student learning when they inquire into their practices may serve as a more affirmative approach to teacher inquiry. Envisioning teacher inquiry through an appreciative mindset acknowledges that teachers have personal and professional motivations to teach and learn professionally. When these motivations are fostered in positive, safe and supportive climates of inquiry, teachers may be more prone to seek ways to extend their practice. Since teachers are ultimately the ones who can make an impact on student learning, it makes sense to provide them with more opportunities that can increase their motivation to learn.

## **Brian – Emotions**

Brian responded to a paper advertisement that I posted at university. When we met, he was on study leave from his deputy-principal position and in the midst of writing his Masters' thesis. We started by talking about the challenges of conducting research. Throughout our ninety-minute conversation, he constantly checked with me to ensure that I was collecting relevant data for my research. I found this to be slightly amusing but I do not think that he was convinced of my intention to listen to his experiences because he kept questioning my research intentions. It seemed inconceivable to him that researchers would want to listen to teacher stories about lived experiences.

He shared his inquiry experiences as a school leader and teacher. He spoke about different aspects of teaching such as the introduction of the “teaching as inquiry” cycle in curriculum, the challenges of implementing useful professional development for teachers and the increasing pressure on schools to become adept in analysing and using data to represent student learning. He construed teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning and a model of professional growth. He supported the implementation of teacher inquiry because he believed that it could increase professional collaboration and dialogue about teaching practice.

In his stories, he described teacher inquiry as an intellectual and emotional process. As such, he shared memorable learning moments that were punctuated with vulnerability, uncertainty and anxiety. Despite these feelings, he favoured teacher inquiry because he believed that it was a realistic and meaningful way to learn professionally.

### *A Profound Experience*

*Teachers had to do “teaching as inquiry” but could opt to having a coach support them or the traditional principal visit that happened twice a year with written observations. Coaches would visit twice a term and have regular conversations about*



*how things were going because the coach was a peer coming in and observing regularly. You become more comfortable as you build that coaching relationship and understand how it works but you also open yourself up a little bit to vulnerability.*

*I was putting myself out there compared to being nice and protected in my classroom where I felt that I was doing a good job because things were going well, kids were getting results, and the kids and parents liked me. I was used to having senior leaders in the school coming in and critiquing because I had a way of processing that. If they liked it, that was great. If they did not, I would listen but I was happy to take or leave what they had to say. Things were different with peers because they worked alongside you. You are vulnerable because you are seen as having expertise or supposed to have expertise so you put some pressure on yourself.*

He described how a peer-coaching structure to inquiry changed the way that he learnt professionally. He felt uncomfortable with this new way of learning because he felt more pressure to demonstrate his teaching abilities, albeit these pressures could have been self-inflicted. I found these self-reflective moments refreshing because they illuminated different aspects of teacher learning experiences.

His peer-coaching experience reminded me of “*collegial coaching*” where “self-reflection and professional dialogue” are used to increase teacher talk on practice (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 231, emphasis in original). Even though he felt vulnerable opening his practice to a peer coach, he chose this option because it was more challenging to discuss his practice with a fellow teacher than school leader. I found this surprising since school leaders often held the responsibility for evaluating teaching practice. I think he might have found more value in conducting regular conversations about practice with his peer coach than two formal

discussions with his school leader. It sounded as if these frequent professional conversations about practice helped him to deepen his inquiry and reflections.

Perhaps this increased communication also made him feel more vulnerable because it exposed him to more scrutiny than the traditional form of teacher evaluation. Teaching is an inherently vulnerable practice because it requires teachers to be continually be susceptible to factors that are beyond their control (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 266). His feelings of vulnerability alerted me to the emotional undertones in his experience and made me more attentive to the emotional aspects of teacher learning.

*In my inquiry, I looked at the four new iPads because I wanted to use them to improve Maths achievement and skills. I thought I was going to find out some great websites or apps and use that for them to share. My coach did some student voice early on and one child said, “Mr. B explains things a little complicatedly.” This hit me because it was right from the mouth of babes! I believed that my core job was to explain things even though I do a lot of other things so this comment really hit me. My coach also did some observations and questioned the way I was using the iPads because knowledge was co-constructed. I had to think of how to add discussion, dialogue and interactions because I was only using them as expensive textbooks. I had to think of what needed to change in my approach to teaching to maximise them. I started to think about the idea behind flipped classrooms where students watched their tutorials at home and come to school to do their practical work so that the teacher would be able to support them. It evolved into a “flip learning” programme in class because I did not want to send them home.*

When teachers solicit feedback on teaching practice, they make themselves vulnerable to their students. However, with this vulnerability they also increase their chances of building

positive learning connections with students that could further stimulate the learning process (Bullough, 2005, p. 24). He was shocked to hear negative feedback from his students and peer-coach but they made him consider what he had taken for granted in his practice. Even though teachers naturally use student behaviour to gauge learning, this form of interpretation may lead to “spurious” conclusions (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 231). In Brian’s story, his spurious beliefs were exposed when his students shared their sentiments about his practice. I think their feedback caused him to be more critical of himself and to be more aware of their learning needs.

Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) posited that teachers need to have adequate “time, space or encouragement” within their rigid schedules to get to know their students more intimately. They postulated that the current trend in education that promote standardised learning priorities and processes through specified outcomes might have stymied teachers’ capacities to develop strong emotional bonds with their students. It was unclear if this was the case in Brian’s story but I think that his inquiry provided him with useful feedback that he valued. Since he recalled the moment that he heard his students’ feedback vividly, I think that he was genuinely shocked when he found out that his students did not understand as much as he thought they did. After he heard their feedback, he started to question how much he really understood his students. Perhaps this experience might have influenced him to form closer relationships with his students. Even though their feedback was surprising, it spurred him to question entrenched ways of thinking about teaching and learning, which led him to experiment with new ideas.

*I shared this experience with staff as my model of my teaching practice where I was using different things to think and reflect, while using student achievement data to see if it made a difference. Everyone had to share their “teaching as inquiry” in a five-minute presentation. There was a push to keep time limits down so that it would not*

*go for too long because these presentations were formal expectations. This gave some rigour to the process so that it did not become a tick-box.*

*They were threatening in a general sense because you felt vulnerable getting up in front of your peers and being judged. So, it was really good to hear teachers who said, “Actually, this shows that it did not work”, or that the results were inconclusive because it did not go up or down. It was really valuable for people to see that you give things a go, reflect and take elements out of it. I found that sharing and collaborating were the most invaluable parts. The best form of documentation is sharing because it is about building our collective knowledge and skills.*

He characterised teacher inquiry as a growth opportunity that enabled him to collaborate with a peer coach. He valued these conversations because his coach acted as a supportive peer who listened to his reflections and challenged him to think differently. Even though he indicated that he had a choice between peer-coaching and traditional teacher evaluations, I wondered if he was assigned to a coach. Since he may have had an assigned coach, his story illuminated the possibility that a contrived professional relationship could be beneficial when both parties were able to work honestly with each other.

When established as a “preliminary” part of collaborative efforts (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 238), contrived collegial ties could provide teachers with formal incentives to build genuine professional relationships. In Brian’s case, it enabled him to form a professional relationship with his peer coach. He believed that this relationship played a key role in his professional learning and it sounded as if this was his first professional collaboration. This experience helped him to open up his practice to others and to be more comfortable talking about his practice.

Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) cautioned that initial efforts to introduce professional collaboration may be built upon “*contrived collegiality*”, and further initiatives are needed to foster the growth of these relationships (p. 238). Thus, it is important for schools to provide teachers with opportunities to continue these relationships in a professional setting. I think this occurred in Brian’s school when the peer-coaching option became an accepted form of teacher inquiry.

Since teacher inquiry was implemented as a form of teacher learning and evaluation, his school trialled peer-coaching as a different way to learn and evaluate practice. Teachers were asked to choose between collaborating with a peer and the more traditional form of teacher evaluation conducted by principals. Despite the supportive stance his peer-coach adopted in evaluating his practice, he felt more stressed being observed by his peer-coach than his school principal. This would have been quite stressful since he had multiple observations and evaluations but these must have been worthwhile because he believed that they gave him a better understanding of his practice.

Brian believed that learning through inquiry was an uncertain process. He shared this belief when he described how some inquiries were more successful than others in improving student learning. At his school, they encouraged teachers to share their professional learning challenges alongside the impact on student learning because this allowed teachers to depict teacher learning as an uncertain process. He stated that it was important to talk about the inquiries that did not show visible changes in student learning because they showed that teachers were experimenting with new ways of teaching. He felt that it was more important for teachers to gain the confidence to try new or different approaches to teaching than to focus on demonstrating inquiries that made an impact on student learning.

*The “teaching as inquiry” approach has been effective for me because you have your coach coming in to work with your kids and you have back and forth conversations about practice. It is not as judgemental as looking at the achievement data of the whole class, which can be quite definitive as a performance grade. You typically look at children who are struggling so you are trying to do something extra for that group. Everyone acknowledges that things have not worked or it is a lot harder work to make progress with that group. That takes pressure off from accountability and performance factors because it looks more as a growth model that is about trying, implementing and learning things from it to build your practice.*

Since he had autonomy over his teacher inquiry process, he construed formal teacher inquiry as an extra attempt to help struggling students. He construed it as an opportunity to focus on the needs of particular students who required additional support in their learning. To him, formal inquiry did not carry the pressure of teaching accountability or performance because these students already had a history of underperformance. Thus, formal inquiry was just an additional attempt to ensure that these struggling students were getting extra attention. Based on these perceptions, I think he conceptualised teacher inquiry as a practical, empowering and situated form of teacher learning.

### *Exploring Emotions*

I was drawn to the emotions that Brian discussed in his story because there were many times that he made sense of his experiences from an emotional point of view. There were several emotionally-challenging moments that surfaced during our conversation. For example, the shock that he had when he heard unfavourable things about his practice from his students, the vulnerability he exposed himself to when he opted for a peer-coach, the uncertainty he felt when he had to be open and honest with his peer-coach, and the pressure of sharing his

inquiry findings and learning through a presentation. These sentiments captured the emotional stress that he experienced in the process of learning through teacher inquiry. I think he decided that teacher inquiry was a beneficial form of teacher learning because he was able to persevere beyond these feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and vulnerability. His story enabled me to imagine the emotional experiences that teachers may go through when they learn through teacher inquiry.

I found the way that he negotiated through his feelings in order to arrive at a sense of gratefulness at the end of the inquiry thought-provoking. For me, it accentuated how teachers who inquire may feel threatened at the beginning of their experience because their inquiry forces them to confront weaker aspects of their practice. Thus, persevering through these troubling emotions requires self-awareness, confidence and courage. According to Aitken and Sinnema (2008), teacher inquiry also requires “open-mindedness, fallibility and persistence” because these qualities help teachers to conceive inquiry as a discovery-driven process of teacher learning (p. 53). These notions about inquiry made me interested in the emotions that teachers may experience when they inquire to learn professionally.

Examining teacher inquiry through an emotional lens can shed a different light on teachers’ inquiry experiences. This examination could illuminate the unpredictability of professional learning, the complexities of using teacher inquiry as a form of learning, and the challenge of supporting teachers intellectually and emotionally during inquiry. I will explore the emotional landscape of teaching and learning in the following discussion to develop a better understanding of teacher emotion.

### *An Emotional Perspective of Teacher Inquiry*

It is undeniable that the formalisation of teacher inquiry has changed the way that teacher learn professionally. When teachers inquire formally into their practice, they are required to

speaking about their practice to others such as their peers or school leaders. These professional collaborations are deemed to be a beneficial method of sharing practice. In Brian's case, he discussed his practice with a peer-coach and at the end of the school year he also shared the highlights of his experience with other teachers. Such actions can be interpreted as a move to deprivatise teaching practice.

When teachers speak about their practice, they might experience anxiety, scrutiny and stress. For example, Brian felt anxious and vulnerable when he had to discuss his practice with his coach. While these professional conversations may help teachers to better understand themselves, teachers can experience "dissonance" when they are confronted with new information or skills that are "incongruent" with their existing understandings (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 8). If Brian's experience is regarded as an example of dissonance, he stated that he was able to work through his uncertainties with the help of his coach because his coach provided him with the mental and emotional support that he needed to change his practice. Even though the need for change was not explicitly discussed, it might have been an implicit expectation.

The need for change is embedded with the teacher inquiry movement. Teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning is viewed as a method to increase quality teaching that can improve student learning. It carries the expectation that teacher learning should result in "improved outcomes that can be seen and measured" in terms of student learning (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 149). However, attaching such a focus on teacher inquiry can potentially undermine the meaningful learning that teachers can gain through inquiry.

When I envision meaningful learning experiences, I think of what Dewey (1910) described as a state of "intellectual curiosity" (p. 219). This state of curiosity can be cultivated through teacher inquiry when teachers are given opportunity and time to discuss the thinking that



underpins their practice. The inverse can occur when teacher inquiry is rigidly structured because circumscribing their curiosity may cause teachers to conduct perfunctory inquiries that lack meaning and depth. Thus, finding ways to support teachers' intellectual curiosity during inquiry can enhance their learning experience. One way to develop more supportive forms of inquiry would be through an emotional understanding of what teachers might go through when they inquire into their practice.

Teaching can be envisaged as an emotional process of engagement. It is a social practice that requires teachers to interact with others such as students, parents, colleagues, school leaders, and the community around them. These emotional bonds show that teaching is a professional practice that naturally places teachers under the scrutiny of others. As such, when teachers refer to their sense of professionalism, they usually describe how they are perceived by others (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 152). Thus, teaching can be understood as a personal practice that is influenced by social, political, economic, and cultural forces beyond teachers' control. Since these forces can affect how teachers conceive their identities and sense of purpose, teaching can be understood to be a personal, professional and relational practice.

When teachers teach, they open themselves up to others. Teachers experience various emotions when they teach because "emotions are at the heart of teaching" (Hargreaves, 1998b, p. 835). These emotions can affect the way that teachers view themselves as teachers, learners and professionals. When teaching is construed as a personal craft, it highlights how teachers invest themselves into their practice. Thus, when teachers inquire and place their practice under scrutiny, there is an increased likelihood that they may experience deep uncertainty and upheaval. When teachers expose their practice to students, peers or school leaders, they make themselves vulnerable to criticisms.

When teachers inquire, they may uncover latent parts of themselves or their practice that they may not have considered or realised previously. I describe teacher inquiry as an act of placing “a mirror to the soul” (Palmer, 1997, p. 15). This metaphor highlights the process of deep and personal reflection that teachers may go through when they examine aspects of their teaching souls. Teachers’ emotions are intensified when they study themselves or their teaching souls because they may confront ingrained assumptions, values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

When teachers inquire collaboratively or share their inquiries with others, they do this self-examination in the front of others, which could make them feel “publicly exposed” (Nias, 1996, p. 8). As such, a heightened awareness of the emotional repercussions of collaboration is necessary to understand the emotions that teachers can experience when they inquire and speak about their practice. Collaboration could cause teachers additional anxiety and stress but it can be used as a way to provide teachers with social, cognitive and emotional support.

As outlined earlier, the collaborative structures within inquiry have the potential of increasing teachers’ negative emotions such as stress, vulnerability and anxiety, conversely, these structures can provide teachers with positive emotions such as empathy, understanding and encouragement. These emotional outcomes are dependent upon the quality of professional relationships that have been fostered around them. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) stated that effective teacher collaboration can encourage “sharing, reflecting and taking the risks necessary to change” (p. 84). In collaborative situations such as professional learning communities, teachers act as “experts on what is needed to improve their own practice and student learning” (Vescio et al., 2008, p. 89). Research on effective professional learning communities show that collaborative structures can provide teachers with the support that they need to weather through the uncertainties of teacher learning (Vescio et al., 2008, p. 84).

These professional relationships might help teachers to persevere through the emotional strain of critiquing themselves.

Perhaps this is why teachers such as Brian have experienced collaborations within their inquiry. He believed that his peer-coach helped him to push beyond his own capacity to study his practice. This occurred when he engaged his coach in regular conversations about teaching practice. Teacher inquiry can change the nature of teacher talk and encourage conversations to “take on an educational purpose” (Avalos, 2011, p. 18). The formalisation of teacher inquiry may have normalised professional dialogue about practice and made it easier for teachers to turn to their peers for cognitive and emotional support. Increasing teacher talk through collaboration could reduce emotional isolation that teachers may have experienced in the past.

Strong collegial bonds enable teachers to develop long and lasting professional relationships. When teachers develop close bonds with their peers, it can result in substantive collaborations and teacher learning experiences. However, these bonds require time, organisation and ongoing “administrative support and leadership” (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 238). When collaboration is used to develop authentic collegial ties, teachers are given opportunities to develop trust, an underlying characteristic of strong professional relationships. These relationships can provide teachers with the emotional support they may need during inquiry.

While there are obvious benefits to promoting collaboration within teacher inquiry, it is also important to consider the strong connection between how teachers are “perceived by others” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 262) and how they perceive themselves. As such, it is crucial to entertain the idea that teachers will experience heightened emotions when they collaborate. This is why ongoing efforts to sustain purposeful but positive professional relationships should be a priority to school leaders. The importance of these relationships cannot be

understated because it is conceivable that teachers may rely on their school lives as a “main site for their self-esteem and fulfilment” (Nias, 1996, p. 4). Thus, healthy professional climates can contribute towards the general wellbeing of teachers.

When the emotional implications of teacher inquiry are considered, it exposes the idea that teachers can experience positive and negative emotions when they inquire and work collaboratively. Some of these emotions can be alleviated or heightened through collaborative structures that foster professional relationships. It is also pertinent to consider that such collaborative structures can alter the established relationships that teachers have with each other. For example, if teachers have traditionally provided each other with social and emotional support, they may need time and guidance to transition into more critical roles. Some teachers may find it difficult to be emotionally and critically supportive of their peers through formal learning efforts such as teacher inquiry because they may not understand or agree with the idea of being a critical friend. Perhaps this is when contrived collegiality may be useful to initiate new professional relationships that can be grown into purposeful professional relationships.

Emotions represent a complex aspect of teaching. In educational research, emotions have been portrayed as idiosyncratic responses to reforms or an area to be harnessed for improvement agendas (Hargreaves, 1998b, p. 837). In his conceptual framework, Hargreaves (1998a) outlined how emotions are inextricably linked to teaching. Emotions are embedded in teaching because teaching is an emotional form of labour (Hargreaves, 1998a, p. 319) that requires teachers to consider the moral and ethical aspects of their actions and decisions. These considerations can generate emotional turmoil because teaching is shaped by forces beyond teachers’ control.

Since teaching is an emotion-laden act, it demands substantial and ongoing emotional investments from teachers. As such, teacher work is closely related to teachers' "cognitive and emotional identities" (Day & Kington, 2008, p. 8). These intertwined factors within teacher identity explain how changes to teacher work can create destabilising emotional experiences for teachers. When teacher inquiry is framed as a form of teacher learning that has the potential of affecting teachers' identities, motivation, job satisfaction and wellbeing, it becomes imperative to understand what teachers may need to inquire effectively.

If teachers are able to experience teacher inquiry as a feasible and meaningful opportunity to affect student learning, they may be more likely to regard teacher inquiry as a valued form of teacher learning. To implement teacher inquiry as a teacher learning tool that promotes teachers' individual and collective growth, school leaders and policy makers will need to recognise how teachers experience and make sense of their inquiries. This will help them to implement measures that can support teachers' emotional experiences during inquiry.

I discussed these emotional and relational aspects of teaching in regards to teacher inquiry because they depicted the emotional challenges that teachers may encounter. Kelchtermans (2009) asserted that "teaching is fundamentally characterised and constituted by *vulnerability*" (p. 265). Since teachers work in a social milieu where they rely on others, it makes it impossible to escape feelings of vulnerability. For example, even though teachers seek feedback on their practice from students, peers and school leaders, they remain largely uncertain about their influence on learning. This constant sense of powerlessness intensifies the vulnerability that teachers may feel when they inquire and learn from practice.

An understanding of teachers' emotions uncovers hidden challenges within teacher inquiry. Emotions are "political" in the way that they exhibit teachers' "power and powerlessness" (Hargreaves, 1998a, p. 326). Thus, when teacher inquiry is shaped by parochial visions of

teacher learning, it has the potential of repressing teacher autonomy and agency. When teachers feel powerless, they might perceive that they are forced to act in ways that are “inconsistent with their core beliefs and values” (Lasky, 2005, p. 901). This reduces the likelihood that they would derive meaningful learning experiences from their inquiries and also increases the chance of teacher inquiry becoming an act of compliance.

Since teacher inquiry is a teacher learning policy that carries multiple expectations, this is a real concern. For example, the Education Review Office (2012c) stated that limited inquiry occurs when teachers experience inquiry as “part of a performance management system or ... a one-off activity” (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 22) because it makes them more likely to conceptualise teacher inquiry as a form of compliance. Additionally, since teacher inquiry is promoted as a means to improve student learning, teachers may purposefully conduct inquiries that meet this expectation. For example, if teachers feel increased pressure to provide inquiries that can demonstrate improved student learning, they may produce inquiries that are “representational artefacts” (Ball, 2003, p. 225). Since these artefacts are artificially constructed for the sole purpose of satisfying administrative requirements, they are unlikely to contain authentic insights into teaching practice. Under such circumstances, teacher inquiry can cause conflict and turmoil that have an emotional toll on teachers.

It is pertinent to consider the performative implications of asking teachers to produce inquiries that demonstrate changes in practice and student learning because such expectations may lead teachers to construe teacher inquiry to be a performed act of professional learning rather than an authentic inquiry into practice. It is also apt to consider how these expectations may make teachers “ontologically insecure” about themselves because they feel constantly obliged to fulfil lofty or broad educational goals (Ball, 2003, p. 220) that may be unrealistic. While these goals may make teachers strive for betterment, they can cause teachers to overstretch their efforts, which can lead to feelings of powerlessness. If this occurs, it will be

more difficult for teachers to attend to their students' needs, which would counter the overall aim within teacher inquiry. For these reasons, I encourage for more exploration of teacher emotions within the process of inquiry. I think these explorations can help educational stakeholders such as school leaders, teacher-learning facilitators and policymakers to improve their efforts to promote teacher inquiry as a substantive form of teacher learning.

## **Maggie - Tensions**

Maggie was a seasoned teacher and an assistant principal. I met her through the same professional learning and development facilitator who introduced me to Winnie. When we met, she was working with teachers and school leaders to implement teacher inquiry into their school routine. We spent the first part of the interview discussing my motivations for researching teacher inquiry because she expressed a genuine interest in my rationale for listening to teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry. Our interview took approximately two hours but our conversation flowed effortlessly with moments of thoughtful silences.

I felt that she shared her thoughts openly and honestly. Her reflections came across as a process of self-understanding where she explored how she conceptualised teaching, learning and teacher inquiry. She believed that teaching was underpinned by teachers' emotional and intuitive awareness. This awareness motivates and guides teachers in their practice because it originates from their hearts and represents the ethical and moral rationales for teaching. She was concerned that the strong focus on student achievement promoted through teacher inquiry would shift teachers' attention away from developing this kind of awareness about teaching.

As a teacher, she believed that she was responsible for student learning. She routinely used assessment data to inform and guide her practice. Her use of assessment data enabled her to evaluate the impact she had on her students. She felt that the advent of teacher inquiry had affected how teachers and schools make use of their assessment data. Even though she valued teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning, she was concerned how this increased demand for assessment data may detract from meaningful student learning.

As a facilitator, she observed how a preoccupation with assessment data had affected how some schools and teachers had construed the purpose of teacher inquiry. Their preoccupation



with assessment data led them to define teacher inquiry as a way to demonstrate compliance rather than a form of teacher learning. She believed that they linked teacher inquiry to the National Standards policy because formalisation efforts to promote teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning may have been hijacked by a larger push to implement National Standards as a learning trajectory.

### *The Heart within Teaching*

*When I was doing my postgraduate diploma in teaching, we were expected to think about what we were doing, why we were doing it and whether it worked or not. I remember lecturers doing observations and posing open-ended questions that were designed to make you think for yourself. I have done a lot of reflection and realised that beyond teaching kids the basics of how to read and write, and numeracy, you have to put faith in them that the world is a big place that is full of all sorts of knowledge that I do not have all the answers to. I teach them to be their own questioners and seekers of information. This means teachers have a responsibility to not provide answers. I feel the same way in terms of teaching because it is my responsibility to go and find answers. When you have found an answer, question that answer and never accept that the target has been reached.*

*My early years of teaching were never about coming back to the data but in the environment we live in now everything is data-driven. I judged my teaching on a gut feeling, "Did I feel that it was the right thing to do? Do I feel like the kids engaged with that?" I was not methodically thinking about evidence and quantifying other than, "Can I see those kids with smiles on their faces?" I was not writing things down but it was an intuition thing because you know when it is feeling right or awfully wrong. I discovered very quickly with new-entrants that their learning shifted quickly.*

*I established a routine of collecting evidence so that I was not hammering things that they had suddenly grasped. It was much more of an intuitive process. So I worry that in the data-driven evidence-based process we forget and lose the piece of the puzzle where we ask teachers to respond to their emotional and intuitive knowledge about things.*

*I have seen how it can help drive achievement through close analysis of data but it is not just about the data though, it is about intuition as a human being. I am worried that we are not teaching people that emotions and intuition are a part of the process because they force you to look at things to a degree that you perhaps would have missed otherwise. The reason you do that is because you care about the kid and you want the very best for the kid. It is about connecting the head with the heart. The heart is about loving and bringing that love into teaching and feeling motivated to work for the best for that kid.*

She described learning as a process of continuous inquiry to seek knowledge. Based on this understanding, she believed that teaching was about creating independent and critical thinkers. I think that she developed her intuitive approach to teaching from her teaching philosophy and practical experiences. The intuition and emotional knowledge she mentioned resembled what Johansson and Kroksmark (2004) described as “intuition-in-action”. In their phenomenological study, they explored teachers’ reflection and intuition. They developed the concept of “intuition-in-action” based on Schön’s reflective ideas (Johansson & Kroksmark, 2004). To them, intuitive reflection was a more realistic depiction of reflection in action. They reasoned that teachers use “complex tacit knowledge” when they reflect on their actions in real time (Johansson & Kroksmark, 2004, p. 372). Teachers within their study described this internal form of reflection through feelings and instinctual reactions, and they called these their natural “way of being” (Johansson & Kroksmark, 2004, p. 373). Their conclusions

allowed me to better grasp what Maggie meant as intuitive knowledge and how she used this knowledge as an instinctual approach to teaching.

She also highlighted that teaching was an emotional practice. I listened to how she used data to mitigate what Hargreaves (1998a) described as “spurious emotions” (p. 321). In his study, he suggested that teachers’ emotional interpretations were sometimes misleading because they misunderstood their students’ emotional states (Hargreaves, 1998a, p. 321). In Maggie’s case, her habit of collecting evidence supplemented her emotional interpretations of student learning. Perhaps this combination of evidence and intuition offset the possibility of misinterpreting her students’ learning progress.

She characterised her approach to teaching as a combination of intuition, emotion and evidence. To her, emotion and intuition were the “heart” of her practice, while evidence was the “head”. Since these two complemented each other, she employed various methods of assessment to collect data about learning progress and supplemented this assessment-informed picture of learning with her intuitive and emotional perceptions of learning. However, the observations she made as a facilitator made her aware that an overreliance on visible assessment data could diminish the intuitive and emotional aspects of teacher assessments. She was concerned that this could disconnect teachers’ heads from their hearts and cause teachers to lose heart or motivation to teach. She believed that teachers’ hearts motivate and will them to do more for their students. When teachers overuse their heads to understand their students, there is an imbalance and this imbalance could reduce teaching to a routinised practice.

*When I moved from the senior area of the school into new-entrants, I spent that entire holiday getting my hands on anything I could get about good junior school practice, what their learning looks like, and how to set up a programme. I was heavily involved*

*in the “teaching as inquiry” process but I was not recording anything because I spent the first term with it going pear-shaped. At the time I had been teaching for twenty years but I felt like a beginning teacher! That was the biggest learning curve I had ever had! I had to force myself to keep looking for answers. It was more than any of the other teaching challenges I had. It was also the biggest reflection that I did on myself as a person.*

*I had learnt a certain style of presenting myself as a teacher and it worked with all the other age groups but it did not work with five-year-olds. I had to reflect on the way I presented myself as a teacher, the style of teaching I had been used to, and the way I used my personality in teaching as well as the technical aspects of teaching. I felt that when I taught five-year-olds, I could not afford to have any ego. It had to be fun-based otherwise you would lose them. As a younger teacher I thought there would come a day where I felt that I had reached the point of where I could classify myself as a good teacher. The older I have got and the more teaching experience I have gathered, I have realised that there is always going to be change because kids keep changing so the challenges you get from year to year are different. Your cohorts and expectations from the Ministry level change constantly.*

She detailed how teaching five-year-olds was her biggest teaching shift. It forced her to re-evaluate herself, her practice and persona as a teacher. When she reflected, it went beyond acquiring new skills and knowledge. She had to change as a person and find new methods of engaging with her young students. To her, this teacher inquiry was natural, responsive and authentic because her inquiry was based on a real need. This made me realise that she was trying to illustrate how teacher inquiry happened naturally and was not tied to extensive documentation. She also pointed out how an inquiring habit was necessary to survive the internal or external changes in teaching.

*The “teaching as inquiry” cycle is looking at your kids and thinking, “What do I notice about them as learners? What is obvious and less obvious that I need to find out? Where is their achievement at currently? What would be a good learning programme for them?” and then taking responsibility for where they are going. No matter what point they are at, I am the person responsible for moving that student on because it is my responsibility for how that student is doing. It is a reflection of how I am doing as a teacher. Many schools do not have a good understanding around inquiring into their own practice based on evidence, close identification of what is different about students in each priority learner category, how this feeds into aspects of their underachievement, and then digging deep into teacher practice to find what they are doing that might be feeding the underachievement or what they could be doing differently to feed acceleration of achievement.*

As a teacher, she believed it was her professional responsibility to ensure that her students were learning. She equated their learning progress to her effectiveness as a teacher. Her thinking is consistent with the rationale that has been used to justify the formalisation of teacher inquiry. She stated that the publication of the “teaching as inquiry” in the curriculum was a move to formalise teacher inquiry. Formalisation of teacher inquiry through this cycle persuades teachers to use inquiry as a means to guide their practice. The inquiry process has been framed as a means for teachers to investigate into the “impact” of their practice on learning (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35). This means that when teachers inquire, they focus on demonstrating how their practice has made an impact on student learning. Teacher inquiry can be interpreted as an attempt to make teachers accountable for their actions.

For her, teacher inquiry represents an opportunity for schools and teachers to investigate their practices. She believed that teacher inquiry could compel them to evaluate how their priority students were performing. It sounded like she subscribed to the belief that teaching makes an

impact on student learning because she repeatedly stated that teachers needed to understand the impact of their actions if they wanted to take responsibility for student learning. The way that Maggie outlined her sense of responsibility for student learning showed that she agreed with the idea that teacher inquiry could be used to pay closer attention to students. As a facilitator, she used this rationale to justify the need for teacher inquiry because she felt that it could compel teachers to focus on the needs of priority students.

*Formalising is about committing my thoughts to a piece of paper. My thinking process has always been around what I can do differently because I always think about what I am doing and how it worked. Prior to formalisation we always had reflection spots on our planning but not to the degree where it is pinned to an individual student's data. The way I see it being interpreted by schools now is it is linked to where kids are tracking towards National Standards. So there is close data analysis. It is all about ensuring we can pinpoint the spot that the kid's at and determine that if that is where they are supposed to be and what are we going to do from here.*

She expressed concerns that schools were linking teacher inquiry to the National Standards policy because this changed how teachers reflected on their inquiries. She believed that this link caused teachers to place an emphasis on learning progress rather than learning experience. Perhaps this emphasis made teachers less likely to pay attention to the learning process and made them more focused on demonstrating learning progress. This reasoning explains why she perceived that there was a weakened bond between teachers' heads and hearts in teaching.

When teachers focus on meeting the learning expectations outlined in the National Standards policy, they may employ their heads or rational thinking skills to assess student learning. This may make them more reliant on assessment data and learning expectations rather than their

intuitive and emotional perceptions of students. She felt that this shift in focus could lead schools and teachers to misconstrue the underlying purpose student learning and the overall motivation for teacher inquiry, which is to learn from practice. She believed this could undermine teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning and turn it into a tool to enforce the National Standards policy instead.

*I am concerned about the research that supports National Standards as reasonable and acceptable expectations for our students. It presupposes a linear relationship about learning that happens in a neat and tidy way. I think we are fooling ourselves if we think we have pinned down all the variables. I do not think we have but I am prepared to work with the puzzle to try and do the puzzle better but I still think there is an element that we are not being completely honest with if we think we have nailed it. I also worry about it becoming yet another expectation on teachers. Schools are not building it to become something that is first and foremost beneficial for teachers. They are making it beneficial for leadership in the school to get the compliance tick from the Educational Review Office rather than making it something that is working for the teachers to make a difference for kids.*

Based on her observations of school-based teacher inquiry, she believed that schools were creating a strong link between teacher inquiry and the National Standards policy. This link was established when the Ministry of Education promoted the “teaching as inquiry” cycle as a self-review tool in their National Standards documentation (2009b). They described how National Standards could provide “sound information about how students are progressing” to parents (Ministry of Education, 2009b). Maggie found it difficult to align herself with this policy because she thought that it promoted the image of learning as a linear path. Her observations and experience led her to conclude that the learning trajectories depicted within the policy could not adequately capture the complexity of learning. She conceptualised

learning as a complex, dynamic puzzle that is influenced by a multitude of factors. Thus, she concluded that there needed to be more robust ways of promoting teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning because this would allow teachers to view teacher inquiry as an opportunity to learn, rather than an act of compliance. It was evident that she wanted to promote teacher inquiry as a consequential form of teacher learning that could enable teachers to make a difference in student learning.

### *Legitimising Apprehensions*

Maggie's role as a professional learning and development facilitator and school leader may have contributed to her heightened awareness of educational policies. She had first-hand experience of how formalisation could be used exclusively to track student learning progress. She saw how this managerial focus reduced teaching to an instrumental level where student achievement triumphs over authentic or meaningful learning experiences. Her story made me wonder about how student achievement and teaching performance were represented through teacher inquiry.

It was difficult to ignore how strongly she felt about the National Standards policy. Her worried tone permeated our conversation and weighed down her enthusiasm for formal teacher inquiry. She was concerned that the National Standards policy would affect how teachers used and understood formal teacher inquiry. Her experiences with teacher inquiry led her to believe that when teachers conducted teacher inquiry perfunctorily, or as a means to demonstrate professional accountability, they diminished the opportunity to learn from their practice. It also increased the likelihood of teachers relying on assessment data or National Standard expectations to understand learning progress. She believed that this would diminish teachers' capacity to use their intuitive or emotional abilities to understand their students' learning needs.



The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2013b) praised the National Standards policy as a model of assessment because of its high level of teacher autonomy. They lauded how the assessment process places a “remarkable level of trust in schools and school professionals” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013b, p. 62). They described how teachers can collectively pool their expertise in pedagogy and assessment to form a more realistic picture of learning (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013b, p. 85). When this level of trust is compared against countries with little teacher autonomy or countries with rigid or standardised testing practices, the National Standards policy does sound relatively empowering. Even though this policy does not impose standardised testing, it can be interpreted as an attempt to systemise the assessment structure across schools.

Maggie’s lack of trust in the National Standards policy was palpable and not unique. The National Standards policy has been described as “one of the most controversial school-level developments in New Zealand for decades” (Thrupp & White, 2013, p. 3). Her concerns compelled me to investigate the National Standards policy in order to fully appreciate how it could affect teachers. The discussion below is an exploration of the National Standards policy. In this discussion, I explore how and why this policy has been such a contentious issue.

### *Problematizing the National Standards Policy*

When the Ministry of Education portrayed the “teaching as inquiry” cycle as a self-review tool in their National Standards documentation (2009b), it affected how teachers conceived the purpose of teacher inquiry. They envisioned that teachers could use inquiry as a way to assess learning and to evaluate classroom practices. These associations may have undermined teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning and established a stronger managerial focus on

teacher inquiry. When teachers adapt their inquiries to accommodate these new expectations, it can modify what teachers focus on when they inquire.

To explain how this policy has implications on how teachers understand and use teacher inquiry, I will begin by discussing the rationale for the National Standards policy. The National Standards policy has a controversial history because it was implemented in 2009, despite “strong professional opposition” (Clark, 2010, p. 119). Under public scrutiny and debate, the policy appeared to be so ill-conceived that some schools contemplated taking a public stance against it (Garrett-Walker, 2011). Part of the discord stemmed from its “too-hasty and under-cooked” (Wylie, 2012b, p. 201) plans that side-lined key stakeholders such as teachers, school leaders, parents and communities. The policy was put into action despite the lack of faith and divided reactions by educational stakeholders (Clark, 2010, p. 110). It had many speculating about the long-term repercussions of the policy.

According to the Ministry of Education (2009b), “nearly one in five” students were leaving school without literacy and numeracy skills that would enable them to be successful in the workplace. Tolley (2009), the Education Minister at the time, used this portrayal to create a sense of urgency and need for the National Standards policy. She referred to literacy and numeracy as the “building blocks of learning at primary, intermediate and secondary school” (Tolley, 2009). This legitimised the move to establish minimum standards of literacy and numeracy for five to thirteen-year-old students (Year 1 to 8) and these standards were visualised as a trajectory of learning.

Since this generalised image cannot adequately capture the complexity of learning progress, I believe that teachers are meant to interpret these expectations as aspirational benchmarks that can help them to gauge how their students are performing in relation to their age. In Maggie’s story, she suggested that school leaders and teachers were misinterpreting this trajectory of

learning as a linear portrayal of learning. Her story suggests that some school leaders and teachers may be using these standards as definitive representations of learning rather than aspirational benchmarks.

According to the Ministry of Education (2009b), these benchmarks can act as “reference points” that will signal to schools, teachers and parents that some students are “falling behind”. They claimed that this signalling would generate more timely responses for struggling students. Since this policy could provide the Ministry of Education with a more systematic way to identify and monitor learning progress, Tolley (2009) asserted that it could affect efforts to improve the “achievement of Māori and Pasifika students”. Improving the academic performance of these priority students is an educational priority since they have continually underperformed in standardised tests.

There have been various educational policies that have attempted to address these inequalities such as the Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis programme. This programme established quality teaching as a means to improve student learning and positioned teachers and school leaders at the forefront of improvement agendas. However, this emphasis has shifted the conversation away from extenuating influencers such as social economic status (Clark, 2015; Lee & Lee, 2015). Carpenter and Thrupp (2011) argued that these inequalities in education could be linked to the “inequitable conditions in New Zealand society” (p. 175). They argued that social policies would present a more holistic approach to provide “socially just school outcomes” (Carpenter & Thrupp, 2011, p. 175). Their ideas suggest that school-based factors may not be sufficient to ameliorate the inequalities in education.

To discuss how the National Standards policy may have affected how teachers inquire and learn from their practice, I use the insights and findings from the New Zealand Council for

Educational Research's (NZCER) 2014 national survey of primary and intermediate schools, and the Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) Project.

The NZCER survey reported that a heightened focus on literacy and numeracy had become a source of “tension” for teachers and school leaders (Cathy Wylie & Linda Bonne, 2014, p. 29). Both felt that the intensified focus on literacy and numeracy had affected their educational priorities and reduced their ability to focus on other areas of the curriculum equally. In the RAINS project, Thrupp and White (2013) found that schools were finding it difficult to balance a “broad primary curriculum” with the increased literacy and numeracy expectations (p. 19). The increased focus on literacy and numeracy interferes with schools’ underlying mandate to provide students with rich and diverse learning experiences.

The researchers in the NZCER survey highlighted that 21% of teachers, in a sample size of 713, perceived that National Standards influenced the way they taught (Cathy Wylie & Linda Bonne, 2014, p. 29). This figure alluded to the pressure teachers may have felt to ensure that literacy and numeracy expectations were met. Interestingly, only 3% of principals, in a sample size of 180, perceived that their practices were driven by the policy. This suggests that teachers were more affected by the policy than school leaders. It could be because this policy changes how teachers plan, organise and assess learning activities. Thrupp and White (2013) reported that teachers were performing more literacy- and numeracy-related assessment and learning activities (p. 19). This narrows the schooling experience for both students and teachers.

As mentioned earlier, the National Standards policy was implemented with the hope that it might aid efforts to improve educational inequalities. Thrupp and White (2013) argued this policy may have the reverse effect. They found that the focus on literacy and numeracy can produce a “two-tier curriculum” (Thrupp & White, 2013, p. 21). The two-tier curriculum

widens the existing gap between schools because it affects schools with larger populations of struggling students. It forces “low SES [socio-economic status] schools to push up numeracy and literacy rather than aspire to a broader curriculum” (Thrupp & White, 2013, p. 21). As such, these schools will be more likely to provide their students with narrower learning experiences while students from middle or high SES schools can continue to experience broader curricula. These insights indicate that efforts to raise literacy and numeracy levels may be well-intentioned but they ultimately lead to narrower learning experiences for the student population the policy is claiming to help. Carpenter and Thrupp (2011) stated that the policy shifted the dialogue on underperformance towards teachers and schools, rather than other contributory factors (p. 176). They critiqued the feasibility of using generalised standards to set expectations for underperforming students whose lives were drastically different from that of their peers (Carpenter & Thrupp, 2011, p. 176). Their socio-economic focus highlights that learning is a complex process that is influenced by a wide variety of social factors that extend beyond school-based factors.

When generalised standards are used to envision learning expectations, it changes how learning is perceived. In previous educational mandates, learning had been portrayed as an individual process which permitted teachers to create space for their students to pursue individual learning trajectories (Wylie, 2012b, p. 203). The introduction of standards may have diminished this perception that learning is a uniquely, personal experience. Even though these standards have been promoted as aspirational benchmarks, depicting learning as a measurable progression could create the impression that these benchmarks are minimum levels of learning proficiency.

A standard-based view of learning affects how students construe learning. Thrupp (2014) found evidence of student “positioning and labelling” and reported that students were more likely to use standards to communicate and locate themselves in their learning (p. 16). When

students position and label their learning according to standards, they are more likely to perceive achievement as a measure of successful learning. This may introduce additional stress and have adverse effects on their self-image and sense of efficacy. It can affect their motivation, interest and purpose for learning. These changes will inevitably affect teachers because they change how students construe learning.

As stated earlier, teachers have been most affected by the policy in comparison to school leaders. One of the biggest changes for teachers would be the way that learning is assessed. In this policy, teachers have to use their “Overall Teacher Judgements” to evaluate learning. These Judgments are based on teachers’ interpretation of broad descriptions and exemplars provided by the Ministry (Chamberlain, 2010). Thus, these Judgments are reliant on how teachers understand the descriptions and exemplars of learning. The evaluation culminates with teachers rating students on a four-point scale. Students can be “above, at, below and well-below” National Standards. The simplicity of this four-point scale does little to capture the complexity of using standards to gauge learning. Throughout the year, teachers are required to collect evidence of learning achievement through multiple assessments.

Since the process of measuring learning through “Overall Teacher Judgements” is subjective, teachers participate in school-level assessment moderations. These moderated sessions are held to promote consistency across school-wide assessments (Ministry of Education, 2011a). This fluid structure of assessment is liberal in comparison to prescribed standardised tests because teachers have the option of using a large variety of forms and evidence to support their Judgements. The flexibility in the assessment process gives teachers the freedom to customise and justify their assessments but this subjectivity creates inconsistencies.

As such, an integral part of the assessment process is moderation. Teachers’ evaluations are moderated within schools so that teachers can discuss and justify their evaluations with

others. This interpretive process has been described by Poskitt and Mitchell (2012) as a challenging and complex emotional and intellectual process. It brings to the fore “tensions between teachers’ tacit knowledge (*gut feeling*), *intra* and *inter professional judgements*, and *explicit knowledge*” (Poskitt & Mitchell, 2012, p. 72). Their case study of thirty primary school teachers’ understanding of the evaluation and moderation process revealed that teachers needed sufficient time and support throughout the assessment process in order to become experienced enough to create consistent Judgements (Poskitt & Mitchell, 2012, p. 72). Their study echoed the recommendation Ward and Thomas (2015) made about teachers requiring additional time and support to adjust to the expectations of the National Standards policy. These studies exhibited that teachers had to learn a different way of assessing learning. This also indicates that the potential benefits of using teacher judgement to assess learning may only become more noticeable when teachers become more adept with the policy.

There are also other reported benefits to the National Standards policy. For example, Wylie (2012b) envisaged the moderation process as a feasible means to increase professional collaboration amongst teachers (p. 205). It can increase professional dialogue about assessment and encourage teachers to discuss the needs of their students with others. Since the moderation process increases communication between teachers, Poskitt and Mitchell (2012) described the moderation process as a vital part of building teachers’ understanding of the National Standards policy. When teachers work within school teams, they can enhance their individual and collective “understandings of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment” (Poskitt & Mitchell, 2012, p. 70). These teams can foster collaboration and generate more conversations about practice. The moderation process can aid teachers in developing localised assessment criteria that reflect the contextualised needs of their student population.

While the moderation process can act as an opportune platform for teacher learning, it is important to remember that the moderation process focuses specifically on assessing literacy and numeracy learning. When teacher inquiry is associated with these focuses, it may restrict how teachers inquire and learn from their practice. For example, teachers may feel more pressured to focus on literacy or numeracy practices because these assessments feed into their schools' reporting system.

Schools must report on student learning and achievement in terms of standards annually. They also use standards to set annual achievement targets (Carpenter & Thrupp, 2011, p. 176). These reports are submitted to the Ministry of Education to give them a view of how students are performing. Due to the individualised nature of these school reports, they have been dubbed as “ropey” representations of learning (Lee & Lee, 2015, p. 130). The inconsistencies within teacher judgments render these reports useless in terms of inter-school comparisons or league tables. This view was concurred by Ward and Thomas (2015) who were tasked to monitor the implementation and use of standards in schools. In their National Standards School Sample Monitoring and Evaluation Project, they found wide variations in teacher judgments despite increases in “formal” moderation initiatives (Ward & Thomas, 2015, p. 2). They reported that teacher Judgements lacked “dependability” because they showed “changes in teachers’ Judgements of student achievement over time” rather than evidence of changes to student achievement (Ward & Thomas, 2015, pp. 2-3). Since teacher Judgements are not standardised, they can only provide a localised picture of learning. These Judgments cannot provide a general indication of how schools were performing in comparison to others.

Despite these inconsistencies, the Ministry of Education (2016b) has used the information from school reports to publish detailed infographics about schools and learning achievement targets under the “Public Achievement Information” initiative. These infographics provide a



visual and tabulated view of how schools have been performing in Reading, Maths and Writing since 2013. They show how each area is progressing toward the outlined target of 85% of students being on level. Since these infographics normalise learning as a measurable target, it can subtly change how learning progress is measured and communicated to educational stakeholders such as parents.

I began this discussion to develop a better insight into Maggie's thoughts about the National Standards policy. I believe that the purpose of teacher inquiry shifted when it was associated with the policy. In schools, she observed that school leaders and teachers were more preoccupied with assessment data and achievement targets rather than students' learning experiences. These observations led her to believe that the policy has altered how learning is conceived. This belief raises questions about how the National Standards policy has changed the educational system. In the RAINS project, Thrupp and White (2013) stated that teachers and schools will continue to face strong pressure to justify student learning in terms of standards. Whilst there are some benefits within the policy, associating teacher inquiry with an assessment-driven view of learning can be limiting because it reduces teacher learning to an assessment tool. Such a parochial view of teacher inquiry may hamper efforts to promote teacher inquiry as a consequential form of teacher learning.

### **Anna and Cat – Collaboration**

I met Anna and Cat through Tammy. Anna was the deputy principal of the school and an experienced teacher. Cat was a seasoned teacher and together they were an inseparable teaching team. Since they collaborated regularly, they wanted to be interviewed together. When I asked if it was important to discern between their views, they stated that they shared a common understanding of teacher inquiry so they wanted their story to be told as a collaborative rather than as individual experience.

Anna and Cat described teacher inquiry as an embedded part of their practice but discerned between informal and formal teacher inquiry. They valued inquiring into their students' needs because it was part of their teaching philosophy. This made it easy to understand why they had a shared view of teacher inquiry. They conceptualised formal teacher inquiry as externally-driven inquiries. These inquiries stood out because they were strongly individualistic. They stated that they had to conduct formal teacher inquiries to show accountability for their actions but conducted informal inquiries voluntarily because it was part of their practice.

Before I met them, I was concerned about how the interview would flow but these worries abated very quickly when we spoke. I sensed that they had an established way of communicating as a team. Sometimes, they appeared to complement each other while at other times, they would openly disagree. Their bond enabled them to have enough trust and respect for each other to voice their individual thoughts. There were moments where I felt as if I was the outsider in their private conversation but I felt very relaxed and comfortable throughout our conversation. Their closeness enabled us to chat for approximately ninety minutes like old colleagues even though we were strangers.

### *Formal and Informal Teacher Inquiry*

*Teachers are involved in their own inquiry all the time, all day, every day. Formal teacher inquiry is only important because we have to prove that we have done it. That is the only reason we write it down. It is part of our annual appraisal system and PD [professional development] is part of that build-up. We have a PD folder that is a collection of PD we have been on. It is not something that I would go back and look at because I know what I have done but you go through it because it is your job description, your record of PD with reflections, formal teaching inquiry reviews, evidence of student voice and planning that meets variable students, and observations that we have to do for another staff member every year. It proves that there is ongoing school-wide PD and that teachers have inquiries on the go.*

They were candid with their opinions of formalised teacher inquiry. Even though they acknowledged that it was a form of teacher learning, they found formal inquiry to be an imposition. I think this affected the way that they conceptualised formal inquiries. This was most evident when they explained that formalised teacher inquiry was linked to the school's performance appraisal system. When formalised, teacher inquiry became something they were required to do rather than something they wanted to do. This gave me the impression that their formal inquiries did not hold much value for them.

Even though they invested time and effort into collecting, organising and exhibiting evidence of their inquiries, these inquiries seemed to lack meaning. Even the learning that they experienced from these formal inquiries, appeared to lack the meaning they attached to informal inquiries. Since these inquiries were conducted to satisfy teaching regulations, they carried a sense of performance rather than authenticity.

*In formalised teacher inquiry, we are asked to think of children's needs with a real purpose because if there is no real purpose, there is no real learning that is useful. For example, this year, we included our Junior Māori children in our programme so that they are ready for the transition to the bilingual units. My knowledge and use of Māori in the classroom was quite limited so I attended sessions with our junior children and thought, "How can I transfer this knowledge back to the classroom to help with their learning of Māori?" My inquiry was to build my knowledge and share it with children and to give them more time to practice.*

*We had quite a few backwards and forwards conversations about using that knowledge that we were learning. They had been learning a little "mihi" to introduce themselves. It did not happen as often as I would have liked because of circumstances but the idea was to practice in their own little meetings, "huis", so that we can pass the knowledge onto the children who do not attend Māori classes.*

*Another one I tried for six months was the "Jolly Phonics" programme. I wanted to look at a new way of introducing Phonics so I trialled it. I read the books and adapted some of it for our children. At the end of the six months, I said "Has this worked for our children?" It did, so I adapted it a bit more and carried on with it. We evaluate how effective things were at the end of the year. We are asked to collect data, student voice and our own OTJ (overall teacher judgement), which is our perception of using all the variables to assess how effective it has been for our children. Then we can say it did not work and it is gone, or we can try and adapt or do something else.*

In this part of the conversation, Cat described two examples of her formal teacher inquiries. She made the justification for inquiry a central motivation that guided her throughout the process. Even though she had the autonomy to determine her inquiry, she seemed to lack the

passion or enthusiasm that she had when she spoke about their informal inquiries. Her formal inquiries seemed to be delimited by time even though she mentioned that she could choose to conduct shorter or longer inquiries. These time constraints may have led her to construe that it was more important to report on the outcomes or changes in practice rather than to continue inquiring into that area of focus. Perhaps this challenged the way that they conceptualised inquiry as a form of learning. To them, inquiry was also a way of being or a mindset towards teaching.

*There were always self-reviews and appraisal systems in schools but we have never had one this formal before. You always had to do PD but just recently it has been called teacher inquiry. We argued that teacher inquiry was what we did with the children but our principal said, “No, this is something you need. You think I want to try this and I want to see how this has worked because of this reason and see what the outcome is.” I did not really understand it when our principal said, “You are going to be doing teacher inquiry.” I thought, “No, not another thing to do and we have got to record it” and I struggled to come up with something to inquire about. At the end of that year as I was struggling to think of something to put into practice and reflect on, I suddenly realised what it was but Anna knew all along so I was just a little bit behind. I did not know that was what formalised teacher inquiry was about because what we were doing had never been labelled as teacher inquiry.*

Even though Anna and Cat defined teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning, they seemed to associate it more with demonstrating accountability. The way they described their formal inquiries reminded me of the “evaluation documents” the Education Review Office (2012c) associated with limited inquiries (p. 24). These inquiries focus on evaluation and treat teacher inquiry as a “requirement to be met” (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 24). This description seems to fit the way that they described inquiry as a process of trial and

documentation. When teachers view teacher inquiry as a requirement, it could diminish the learning potential within inquiry because teachers may envisage it as a way to satisfy formal requirements rather than an opportunity to learn professionally.

In their conversation with the school principal, there seemed to be a lack of purpose for teacher inquiry. It would appear their principal had stated that teacher inquiry was needed because teachers needed to show how they were trying different things. It is unclear if this was because their principal shared their view that teacher inquiry was a formality that had to be fulfilled or if their principal's explanation of teacher inquiry had been unclear. According to the Education Review Office (2012c), school leaders play a significant role in establishing an inquiry climate in schools. Perhaps their view of teacher inquiry would have been different if they had encountered a more convincing rationale and vision of teacher inquiry.

*One of our big inquiries was when I followed a lead that Anna initiated which was to look at the Reggio-Emilia style of teaching and philosophy. We applied to the board of trustees to fund us to go to Melbourne for a week in one of the school holiday breaks to observe the whole philosophy. We had to adapt a lot of it because the schools we visited were private schools and kindergartens that were specially made for that purpose. One of the biggest things I got out of it was observing children in an environment where they are in charge of their learning. I talked to the teachers about how they got them there and about what fantastic things they could do when they were in charge because it is their ideas.*

*In the beginning, I was constantly looking over my shoulder in case someone else walked in the room and said, "What are they actually doing? What are they learning? Why are they not sitting at their desks?" Anna was surer of her belief in doing something a little different and being able to justify it. She knew a little bit about the*

*process and had done a lot more reading in it but it was something that I had to go and see because it was not something I could have just gone by from a book. I would not have quite believed it but I got over that and it did not take long once I got familiar with that philosophy. Anna clarified, explained, and helped me a lot with that.*

*We have gone away from children at desks and filling in worksheets. We have stations set out so we can work with a group of children for reading, writing or Maths while other children have choices around the room of whatever interests them. I have got building out there and so much comes out of that like our school values of self-control, cooperation, and encouragement. We knew that they need socialisation, expression through play, and manipulative skills like how to cut and put things together. All of these things have come through our own personal teacher inquiry and it might not be a poster saying you have done all these things but it goes back to them. We have not got an A4 piece of paper of "This is what we do" because it has come from many years of working with these children and knowing what works well for them.*

When they reflected on their personal or informal teacher inquiry, they spoke with great passion and pride. They were very proud of how much their practice, classroom routines and atmosphere had changed based on this inquiry. In this inquiry, they appeared to have the support of their principal and school board. Perhaps the biggest difference between this informal inquiry and their formal inquiries is that they had a clear sense of purpose of why they were inquiring. They inquired because they believed that they needed to change their existing practices to better suit their students' needs. It puzzled me that they could not or did not apply the same rationale and motivation in their formal inquiries. This alerted me to the

possibility that there may be an adverse effect to tracking teacher inquiries through formal documentation.

*Teacher inquiry has formal bits but is also personal. It could be a learning thing that I could capture on paper like letting go or not being anxious about all the toys that are out. This was a self-driven inquiry that came from the heart whereas the other we needed to do it. You can see the benefits and you put your all into it but it is not something that comes from us as much. When we talk about the Reggio philosophy, it is something that we have seen that makes changes, and the others have made just as many changes but I am not as passionate about them. When we chose the Reggio way, we knew that it was spot-on to where we wanted to look for our children.*

They believed that they were more invested in their informal inquiries because these inquiries were self-motivated. Even though they found formalised teacher inquiry to be generally beneficial, these inquiries did not come “from the heart”. Since they had to conduct formal inquiries to satisfy administrative requirements, the sense of obligation outweighed the meaning they derived from these inquiries. Even though it was unclear, I wondered if they experienced a lack of justification or a clear purpose for formal teacher inquiry or if their lacking enthusiasm could have been caused by the need for documentation. Since they appeared to have a strong level of autonomy over their formal inquiries, it puzzled me that they did not conceptualise these inquiries to be as meaningful as their informal inquiries.

### *Making Connections*

I found it difficult to understand why Anna and Cat regarded formal and informal teacher inquiries so differently. When I noted that their informal inquiries were often collaborative, it made me question if they would have experienced formalised teacher inquiry differently if they had conducted collaborative teacher inquiries. As a teaching team, they conducted



informal inquiries together and it helped to shape their classroom practices. They seemed to identify with these inquiries more because they described them with a stronger sense of purpose and meaning. This made me consider how collegiality may have played a role in their collaboration.

Their stories did not include references to inquiry cycles or models but the Education Review Office (2012c) stated that teacher inquiry is most often associated with the “teaching as inquiry” cycle published in the curriculum. This cycle depicts teacher inquiry as a teaching approach that causes teachers to examine their teaching actions. In the “teaching as inquiry” model, teacher inquiry was promoted as an individualised approach to explore more evidence-based approaches to teaching. In a later publication, Sinnema and Aitken (2011) clarified that their model promotes teacher inquiry as a practice-based form of teacher learning (p. 35). They stated that teachers could inquire in order to examine their individual teaching practices, so collaboration was encouraged rather than required.

In the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle, teacher inquiry was promoted differently because it was conceived as a collective process that occurred at “three inter-related and parallel levels” (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlii). In this cycle, teacher inquiry is part of a continuous cycle of inquiry and teachers are encouraged to view their practice as a collective responsibility. Teachers collaborate to investigate how their individual and collective practices have contributed to “existing patterns” of underachievement (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xliv). In this cycle, collaboration is used as a means to discuss practice. Anna and Cat’s collaborative approach to inquiry made me wonder about the purpose of collaboration in formal teacher inquiries. In the next section, I examine how collaboration can be conceptualised within the inquiry process.

### *Defining Collaboration*

Teachers have been encouraged to become lifelong learners to survive the diverse challenges that they are confronted with in this era of uncertainty. This push to learn professionally has influenced how teachers learn individually and collectively. In New Zealand, teacher inquiry was formalised as a form of teacher learning to encourage teachers to inquire and learn from their practice. Formalisation efforts portrayed teacher inquiry as a feasible way to challenge existing patterns of practice and associated it with the ongoing push to improve student learning.

In the “teaching as inquiry” cycle and model, inquiry is portrayed to be an individual endeavour while in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle, teachers are encouraged to examine how their collective practices have affected student learning (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlv). The latter cycle persuades teachers to view teaching and teacher inquiry as a collective practice. Timperley et al. (2007) believed that teacher inquiry would be more sustainable if teachers inquired in professional communities that encouraged them to extend and challenge existing practices (p. xlvi). Their vision of teacher inquiry suggests that a collective approach to teaching could make a more significant impact on student learning.

Teacher collaboration can be construed as the act of working together professionally. According to Dewey, collaboration can enhance the meaning-making process because it exposes teachers to varied perspectives and insights (Rodgers, 2002, p. 856). In Anna and Cat’s story, they collaborated when they inquired into their practice informally. This collaboration enhanced their professional relationship and became one of the key reasons they continued to teach at the same school. Their collaborative experiences nurtured the care, respect and trust they had for each other. These qualities that demonstrate the depth or

“quality” of professional connections can be understood as “collegiality” (Kelchtermans, 2006, p. 221). Kelchtermans (2006) posited that “collaboration and collegiality constitute and reflect each other” (p. 221). This means that when teachers work together they may develop collegial ties that are affected by the “meaning and value” they derive from working with each other (Kelchtermans, 2006, p. 221). For example, the collegiality that undergirded Anna and Cat’s collaborative inquiries gave them stronger personal and professional meaning.

Their relationship compounded the commitment, purpose and significance of their inquiries.

To understand the concept of collegiality further, I will use Little’s (1990) conceptualisation of collegiality to discuss why teachers may want to collaborate professionally. Her continuum depicts how teachers move from being independent to being interdependent through different types of collaboration. She described collaboration as “storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work” (Little, 1990, p. 512). At one end of the continuum, teachers connect with each other through small talk, stories or by sharing teaching ideas. They talk to share personal insights or experiences to build social relationships (Little, 1990, p. 514). These stories may touch upon teaching moments but generally do not involve an in-depth analysis, discussions or reflections of practice. This type of collegiality is about promoting the social atmosphere or general wellbeing of teachers.

Teacher talk changes when teachers approach their colleagues for assistance. Since asking for help may have negative connotations, teachers will be selective with whom they approach and how they ask for advice. These implications make it difficult for experienced teachers to seek peer counsel, thus, this type of collaboration is often limited to beginning teachers (Little, 1990, p. 517). A more accepted way of talking about practice is through sharing. These collaborations may occur as presentations or open discussions about teaching strategies or resources (Little, 1990, p. 518). While sharing creates a public platform to talk about practice, what teachers choose to talk about depends on the extent of their professional

connections. This means that teachers will need to feel safe, trusted and supported before they open themselves to public scrutiny.

At the other end of the continuum is joint work. When teaching is conceived as a joint venture, teachers are encouraged to be interdependent. This interdependency may make their professional relationships more purposeful and meaningful. When joint work is structured to enable teachers to develop a collective vision of teaching, it compels teachers to make their practice more visible to others. It also causes teachers' personal actions to be "both constrained and enabled" (Little, 1990, p. 521) because their autonomy is affected by group norms. These norms play a pivotal role in impeding or enriching teacher learning because they represent the "power relations" that shape practice within communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). When power is negotiated, it may produce a safe climate in which teachers are able to discuss their practices in greater depth and detail. These discussions may give teachers greater recognition for their particular expertise or knowledge. On the other hand, a high level of interdependence can lead to groupthink and uncritical adoption of ideas. Collaboration can cause teaching cultures to become "conflictual terrain" that sustain perfunctory forms of teacher learning (Contu & Willmott, 2003, p. 287). When group norms enforce or sustain dominant practices, it could turn teacher learning into a form of enculturation.

Little's (1990) continuum provided valuable insight into how different types of interaction can contribute to the quality of professional relationships. These interactions shape collegiality and affect how teachers collaborate with each other. This understanding of collegiality and collaboration enabled me to imagine how collaboration can be implemented differently through the existing models and cycles promoting teacher inquiry.

In the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle, collaboration is used to provide teachers with an understanding that teaching is a collective responsibility (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xliv). This type of collaboration moves teachers towards joint work and a common vision of practice. In the “teaching as inquiry” cycle and model, teachers are encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues to tap into their experience, skills or knowledge (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2007). This type of collaboration is akin to asking for assistance or sharing. These varied purposes will affect how teachers experience collaboration within their inquiry.

In Anna and Cat’s stories, they discerned between informal and formal teacher inquiries. They collaborated in their informal inquiries and spoke of shared purposes and visions of practice. This collaboration was underpinned by a shared belief that they were working together to take responsibility for student learning. They supported each other emotionally and cognitively, and it deepened their professional relationship. This support helped Cat immensely when they decided to implement an inquiry-driven curriculum. When teachers explore new or different practices, they push themselves to venture beyond routines that can cause them to experience “dissonance” (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 8). They experience this type of conflict when they are confronted with new information that may not fit or align with existing ways. I believe that Cat experienced dissonance when she had to change the structure of her classroom and teaching approach. She credited Anna as her support and guide through this challenging experience. She believed that she would not have persisted without Anna’s support. I think their collegiality gave her the courage and confidence that she needed to implement drastic changes to her practice.

It would appear that the collaboration they experienced in their informal inquiries were more aligned with the collaboration Timperley et al. (2007) promoted in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle. Their collaboration allowed them to share the responsibility of

teaching rather than their formal teacher inquiries. They described their formal teacher inquiries as individual inquiries and did not mention collaborating with others. It is important to note that I spoke to Anna and Cat in their first year of formal teacher inquiry. They stated that teacher inquiry was a form of teacher learning and evaluation, and a professional criterion for teacher registration. These multiple requirements may have caused them to construe their formal inquiries as formalities rather than professional learning instances. Since teacher inquiry is attached to these individualised requirements, it makes it difficult for teachers to conduct collaborative forms of teacher inquiry. Perhaps collaboration was the missing element that could have given them more purpose in their formal inquiries.

Anna and Cat also spoke of a different kind of professional collaboration that was unrelated to teacher inquiry. As part of their schools' professional development plan, they were required to collaborate with other colleagues for classroom observations. Even though they enjoyed the collaboration, it was undeniable that this mandated form of collaboration was motivated by an administrative need. When collaboration is mandated, it creates "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 238). It forces teachers to create superficial bonds in order to satisfy imposed collaborative requirements. While the professional relationships that they fostered through this mandated form of collaboration were not as deep as their relationship with each other, this form of collaboration was probably used to foster collegiality.

Anna and Cat's stories illuminated the symbiotic nature of collegiality and collaboration. When collaborations are meaningful, they can have a significant impact on professional relationships. According to Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006) collaboration is a core component of professional learning communities (p. 227). It provides teachers with "feelings of interdependence" that can embolden them to pursue new or different practices (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 227). These communities promote teacher learning in

a supportive climate where members work together to learn individually and as a collective. This communal approach fosters a common vision and a collective approach to teaching and learning. Vescio et al. (2008) stated that the core purpose of these communities is to enhance student learning (p. 89). Without this explicit focus, Timperley et al. (2007) implied that collaboration could turn into a “sharing” of stories rather than a focused way of improving student learning (p. 205). They posited that a focus on improvement provides teachers with a stronger purpose and motivation for collaboration.

This focus on student improvement is embedded within the cycles and models associated with teacher inquiry. When teacher inquiry is conceived as an individual undertaking, as promoted in the “teaching as inquiry” cycle and model, this improvement agenda is a solitary inquiry. This may limit teacher collaboration to a sharing of stories, assistance or sharing. In comparison, the collective vision of teacher inquiry promoted in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle provides teachers with a stronger rationale to collaborate. It brings teachers together to discuss the impact of their practices but still regards teachers as self-regulated learners (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xlv). This enables teachers to learn individually and collectively from their practices. As argued in this discussion, one of the key elements to make this collective approach more profound would be to foster strong collegial ties.

Collaborative practices shift teaching away from being an independent, private and autonomous practice. However, collaborative initiatives may engender conflict, magnify diverse teaching motivations and require structural changes in schedules. These costs must be considered in relation to the benefits of deprivatising teaching practices. Little (1990) cautioned that the “assumed link between increased collegial contact and improvement-oriented change does not seem to be warranted” because collaboration can be used to foster improvement or reinforce existing practices (p. 509). Her caution accentuates some of the deeper implications of using collaboration to improve practices.

This discussion highlighted how collaboration is positioned differently in the cycles and models used to promote teacher inquiry. It also foregrounded how different types of collaboration can be used to shape teaching cultures. When teachers foster deep and meaningful connections with each other, these connections can change the way that they experience professional learning. These bonds can provide teachers with substantive learning experiences and can make a difference in student learning. Since teacher inquiry is implemented by school leaders, they will need to make explicit efforts to clarify the rationale for collaboration and implement adequate support and structural changes to encourage collaboration. School leaders may want to consider how the collaborative structures vary according to the different inquiry cycles or models that they choose to implement.



## **Mary – Identities**

I met Mary through a doctoral acquaintance. When we met, she was on study leave from her normal teaching post. She had taken time off to do postgraduate courses to improve her practice. She struck me as an organised, determined and self-motivated teacher. We spoke for approximately ninety minutes. During our conversation, we spoke about how she experienced teacher inquiry as a part of her school's professional development projects and compared them to her postgraduate learning experiences. These projects were tied to particular subject areas and were facilitated by external providers. She associated teacher inquiry with the “teaching as inquiry” cycle. Since these inquiries were related to her school's professional learning and development projects, the focus of her inquiry varied.

Her story exemplified the challenges of implementing teacher inquiry with predetermined focuses, which made for more restrictive inquiry experiences. Even though these inquiries resulted in changes to her practice that made an impact on student learning, she found them to be limited in focus and scope. She arrived at this realisation when she gained more experience as a teacher. This suggests that her expectations as a learner changed with time. These expectations may have motivated her to take postgraduate courses in addition to the formal inquiries she conducted at school. She compared her action research projects to her formal inquiries and concluded that both were useful because they were essentially about improving teaching practice. She found her action research experiences to be more consequential because she felt more autonomous. This enabled her to be more involved and invested in the inquiry.

### *Falling Short of Expectations*

*Our programme went for two years. It made a difference for our kids in terms of achievement and how we changed our practice for teaching writing. We had some PD*

*[professional development] from the facilitator and looked at our own writing practice. We chose four target students, identified their needs and strategies we were going to use to their learning. We filled their needs and strategies on an A3 sheet with a reflection column. We were supposed to reflect after a certain number of weeks or months on how we thought things were going. At the start of PD, I thought we were looking at something that was going to improve my teaching and learning, and my kids' learning but all initiatives start off with a hiss and a roar and like normal schooling throughout the year, other things come up and interfere. I just felt that the ending was not as effective because I did not get what I wanted out of them.*

She experienced teacher inquiry through school-based professional development contracts commissioned by her school. These contracts can vary in duration, focus area and how they are facilitated. When the education system was decentralised, school principals were given the power to manage their teachers' professional learning and development budget and process. Principals can bid on these contracts based on their school's centrally funded allocations. In 2014, a professional development advisory group, comprised of professional teaching agencies and school principals, was formed to restructure this contractual system. This restructure focused on promoting teacher learning initiatives that were explicitly linked to improving "student achievement" (Ministry of Education, 2014). With this restructure, professional learning and development initiatives must place a clear emphasis on forms of teacher learning that can show an impact on student achievement.

*The reflection column was enough for the first round of inquiry but if things were not going well for your students or your teaching was not making a difference then you would surely try or change something and not just say that things did not work. We shared the A3 briefly at staff meetings but it was like, "Bang! Bang! Bang! Got to get through! Got to get through! Great! Awesome! Next!" Sad to say but for some*

*teachers it was a last minute, “Oh, I have not filled out that bit of paper” even though you were supposed to have done it as you were going. It was that whole, “I have to do this and it is another thing that is coming from outside.”*

*We could have had more time to reflect and hear other people's suggestions but it was more about presenting rather than discussing and helping each other. I wanted to know if it actually worked and if I had made any changes but we missed that step and moved onto the next PD topic. It was good for the kids that did well and shifted so I could carry on doing what I was doing but for the ones that did not there was nothing.*

*I was just a beginning teacher then but I felt that when our Deputy Principal was taking our literacy sessions it was more helpful for my inquiry because it was more on us generating our ideas rather than just sitting and listening to the expert tell us what we are meant to be doing. That style was helpful because it allowed people to share if things were not going too well without thinking that people were going to look down on them. In the PD, the main focus was on giving us stuff and then it was up to us to decide which bits and pieces we might pull out of that strategy. I appreciated most of the sessions because lots of stuff was useful but I felt that the inquiry part of the PD was not the driving force. I think you need to have a better understanding before you do any kind of inquiry.*

In her reflections, she continually questioned the purpose of teacher inquiry. Perhaps this is because she believed that her inquiries eventuated into formalities rather than useful, practical inquiries. This could have been attributed to the way that her inquiries had been facilitated or the way that her inquiries had been structured by school leaders. She was disappointed that there was inadequate time and support for deep and purposeful reflections. Her story exemplified how teachers may experience teacher inquiry when it is embedded within

professional development projects. Since these projects are often linked to subject areas and rigid timelines, course facilitators may bring a pre-defined toolkit of resources or strategies to share. This sharing may render the inquiry process ineffectual because there is more emphasis on selecting or trying new strategies rather than a process of genuine inquiry into practice. I think this lack of a genuine inquiry process made her feel as if inquiry was not the driving force in teacher inquiry. She felt that she lacked the opportunity to develop an understanding of her practice.

Her experience differs from how teacher inquiry is promoted as a form of teacher learning that enables teachers to inquire and learn from their practice. Even though she stated that her inquiries used the “teaching as inquiry” cycle, I wondered if her facilitators were guided by teacher learning ideas promoted in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle.

Timperley et al. (2007) theorised that teacher learning could be more significant when it is underpinned by student learning needs. They claimed that these needs could inform teachers’ professional development initiatives and make teacher learning more substantive. It could increase teachers’ motivation to learn and make teacher learning more applicable to student learning. This approach represents an attempt to reduce the uncertainties associated with teacher learning because it is difficult to demonstrate how teachers learn professionally and apply their learning into their practice. Such a lack of clarity makes it challenging to position teacher learning as a way to improve student performance. When I apply these notions to Mary’s story, I thought about the facilitators in her inquiries. Perhaps these facilitators introduced particular strategies or toolkits because they were trying to promote skills and knowledge that they felt could provide teachers with the learning that teachers needed in order to meet the needs of students. This focus on sharing skills and knowledge could have made it less important to justify or explain the underlying purpose of teacher inquiry.

*I think the “teaching as inquiry” cycle gave something for people to focus on. It gave them a little push to change, to keep monitoring and not do what they have always done. I think teachers get a bit busy and I am guilty of it too because I have so much to do. I think, “I will keep doing what I have always been doing because that is what I know.” Sometimes we do need a push to step back and look at what our teaching does for our kids, what areas we need to change or look at ourselves more.*

*Back then I was a younger teacher who did not question because we assumed that the strategies given to us would work because they were experts coming into our school to share their wisdom. Now I am a bit more seasoned and questioning about things that I introduce into my classroom because I think of what it is going to take away from what I am doing already or what it is going to add. I am a bit more cautious so I might try things for a little bit and if it does not work then I am going back to what seems to be working already. I believe in always changing stuff and looking for new or better ways of doing things but I do not just accept stuff straight away anymore.*

It is apparent that she associated teacher inquiry with a change agenda. This agenda is embedded in teacher inquiry because teachers use inquiry to focus on the impact of their teaching. When teacher inquiry is linked explicitly to teaching impact, it could create the impression that inquiry is about increasing student achievement. The Education Review Office (2012c) is unequivocal about this link as they stated that teacher inquiry has the “important task of lifting student achievement” (p. 1). This focus can give teachers the impression that change is necessary because their practices have not catered adequately to student needs. These emphases could cause teachers to conclude that teacher inquiry is more focused on lifting student achievement than teacher learning.

As Mary gained more teaching experience and confidence, she found herself becoming more critical of her professional development experiences. This reminded me of how Hargreaves (2005) described teacher identities in the “middle years of teaching”; teachers who are no longer beginning teachers but are not at the end of their teaching careers. It gave me a better understanding of how her teaching identity had evolved as she gained a deeper understanding of herself as a teacher. While she was receptive of new skills and knowledge, she was more “selective” about adopting these changes (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 981). Perhaps she adopted a more selective approach because she had more confidence in her practical knowledge. This was in contrast with the uncritical stance she had as a beginning teacher. However, with increased teaching experience, the tensions she experienced were different because they arose when she felt compelled to implement changes that contradicted her beliefs or values.

Such tensions may cause her to create dichotomised identities because they force her to balance the demands of teaching against teaching ideals. These identities manifest as “mini narratives of identification” (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark, & Warne, 2002, p. 116) and provide insight into how teachers construct identities to manage conflicts. According to Stronach et al. (2002), these narratives represent “internal employment of professional selves” that teachers construct “in response to shifting contexts” (p. 117). These identities enable teachers to express and make sense of the external impositions placed upon them. In Mary’s case, she assumed two identities; a teacher who was confident in her practical knowledge and a teacher who felt forced to implement mandated changes that she may not have agreed with. These identities surfaced when she found herself more willing to challenge externally imposed changes.

*I looked at action research in my postgraduate studies. I was actually inquiring into my own teaching to become better. I gained more knowledge about how you need a lot of reflection, evaluate what is going on and then start the cycle again because it is*

*a never-ending cycle. I felt these projects were more focused and helpful because I was driving it. It was also more evidence-based because I had to do all the groundwork rather than sitting in a staff meeting and have things given to me. In my action research, I felt accountable to my students so I did not want to waste their learning time whereas in "teaching as inquiry" I thought, "I will use what she has given me, try it, sit back and see what happens." That is probably why I have a better understanding of the action-research process rather than "teaching as inquiry".*

*I enjoyed action research because I was in charge but with PD, it was more waiting and anticipating what we are going to do. I am keen to carry on reflecting, trying new things and evaluating whether they work or not for the rest of my teaching because I know that it is valuable when you are driving it. I think inquiry is more powerful if you are the one that is driving it because it is going to mean a lot more to you. You are going to be more motivated to look for the best strategies or the best whatever it is that you need to help your students. As a professional you should constantly be looking for ways to get better or do the best for your students but when somebody tells you, you have to do something, it is not that motivating. As a teacher I value action research and any type of inquiry because it is all heading in the same direction of trying to improve your teaching and students.*

She found her action research projects more valuable because she was autonomous, engaged and involved in the process of inquiry. The autonomy she experienced gave her a stronger sense of purpose, commitment and understanding of the inquiry process. Even though she understood that the ultimate aim within teacher inquiry was to inquire into her students' learning, she reasoned that they were not as satisfying because she felt passive. In comparison, she felt active and invested in her action research projects. By comparing these experiences, she concluded that autonomy was an integral part of the inquiry process. The

top-down structure that she experienced in teacher inquiry might have caused her to associate her experiences with a sense of obligation rather than an opportunity to learn professionally.

### *Shifting Identities*

Teacher learning occurs in a fragile, contested and complex space where teachers must learn in order to develop their practice. Teacher learning agendas are susceptible to external and internal factors because teacher learning is a personal and professional act. When teacher learning is designed with a balanced understanding of these factors, it could create significant learning experiences. However, finding ways to balance these factors is not easy. For example, Mary felt that her learning needs were sidelined in the teacher inquiry process because there was very little opportunity for her to vary from the central focus of the professional development contract. It meant that she had to focus on writing skills even though she may have perceived a more urgent need to improve reading skills. This lack of autonomy affected how she construed the purpose and value of teacher inquiry. When she experienced a different approach to teacher inquiry through her action research projects, she found them to be more meaningful and significant. She felt autonomous and inquired into areas that she perceived to be suited to the needs of her students. This autonomy made the learning experience more valuable even though they were more demanding. She reasoned that the learning she experienced was more consequential because she was more engaged and invested in the outcome of her inquiry.

Mary's dissatisfaction with her teacher inquiry experiences made me pay closer attention to how she used different identities to position herself. These identities enabled her to position herself as she reflected on the internal and external influences on her practice. For example, she rationalised that teacher inquiry was a beneficial form of teacher learning even though it contradicted her own experiences. In this identity, she portrayed herself as a conformist who



adopted a less critical approach to mandated actions. However, when she spoke of her dissatisfaction with teacher inquiry, she employed a more defiant identity that permitted her to be more critical. In this second identity, she sounded more empowered and more likely to challenge imposed policies. These shifting identities made me wonder if she constructed them temporally to communicate particular aspects of her thinking and beliefs about teacher learning.

A focus on teacher identity work generates a different view of teacher inquiry as a mandated form of teacher learning. It permits an exploration of how teacher inquiry may affect teachers' professional and personal identities. When teachers inquire, they scrutinise themselves. This may cause them to uncover latent parts of themselves and make them more likely to scrutinise "personal and professional values" that are inextricably linked to their identities (Day, 2002, p. 687). These inquiries may challenge and destabilise existing identities and cause conflict. According to Timperley et al. (2007), teachers can be conflicted when they are exposed to new knowledge that challenges their existing values or beliefs (p. 8). It is conceivable for teachers to adopt temporal or situational identities to make sense of these conflicts.

In Mary's story, her identities shifted when she attempted to explain or rationalise the tensions or conflicts that she felt when she inquired. These identities provided hints about how she positioned herself and made sense of teacher inquiry. In the following discussion, I want to accentuate how teacher inquiry may affect teachers' conceptualisation of teaching and professional identities.

### *Exploring Identity Work*

Teaching is a personal and public practice that is susceptible to internal and external influencers. These influencers make it difficult to disentangle personal and professional

identity work. Teaching identities can illuminate the ethical, moral, cultural and social motivations to teach. These identities also expose historical, political or economic agendas that affect teachers' professional lives. When teachers narrate their experiences, they naturally position themselves through identity work.

Since teacher inquiry places teaching practices under scrutiny, it increases attention on teacher work. This increased attention may have pushed teachers into the realm of “performativity” (Ball, 2003). Ball (2003) described performativity as a persistent focus on improving the quality of education through managerial and accountability structures (p. 216). In performativity cultures, there is an explicit drive to display tangible or measurable displays of teaching effectiveness. This emphasis on effectiveness can have an adverse impact on “the teacher’s soul” (Ball, 2003, p. 217) because it compels teachers to think of teaching in terms of productivity and effectiveness.

When teaching is framed in terms of productivity, it normalises measures to quantify teaching. This may cause teachers to be preoccupied with thoughts of how they can “add value” and how this value can be demonstrated in terms of student learning and achievement (Ball, 2003, p. 217). When teaching is envisioned through performative measures, teachers may be persuaded to believe that quality teaching can be measured or represented by a series of indicators. These indicators often outline idealistic expectations of teaching, which can cause teachers to strive for unachievable goals and unrealistic demands on themselves.

When teachers experience these situations, they may create new identities to cope with the pressure to perform or to portray themselves in a better light to others. They may create a “fabrication” of who they are to fulfil these expected ideals (Ball, 2003, p. 222). These fabricated identities can create internal turmoil because teachers may feel obliged to ignore or repress their experiences or knowledge in order to align with outlined expectations. Ball

(2003) found that performative pressures could cause teachers to construct identities with a “heavy sense of inauthenticity”, which can lead them to distance themselves from their practices (p. 222). Teachers use these identities to make sense of or to cope with pressures to fulfil expectations that may counter their personal motivations or beliefs.

Identity work brings to the fore how teachers use different identities to manage external and internal expectations. In Mary’s story, she alluded that she may have disagreed with some of the strategies promoted by professional development facilitators but as a beginning teacher, she assented because she lacked the confidence to challenge the impositions. It is difficult for teachers to challenge impositions even though they may disagree with them. Despite relenting to these external pressures to conform, this conflict may continue internally. For example, in Thrupp and White’s (2013) work on the effects of the National Standards policy, they showed that teachers had to make a “virtue out of necessity” when they were given very little choice but to implement the standards-based assessment approach to student learning (p. 17). Over three years, they found that teachers found ways to incorporate this policy despite possessing a lack of faith in the policy. Their work showed that teachers have to ultimately yield to mandated changes even though they may disagree with the imposed ideas. As outlined in Mary’s story, these circumstances can cause teachers to adopt temporal identities. These identities reflect the sense-making process that teachers go through and they also highlight the different positions teachers can take when they manage internal and external strains. This examination of identity work can generate a more thorough understanding of how teachers use identities to locate their personal and professional selves in educational reform. The insights gained may uncover the different challenges to implementing teacher inquiry as a mandated form of teacher learning.

Since “professional identity, commitment and change” are intertwined, identity work provides a useful angle to examine how teachers make sense of imposed changes (Day, 2002,

p. 689). When teachers use different identities to position themselves in the midst of impositions, it foregrounds their self-understanding, values and beliefs about teaching. These identities are constructed as flexible personifications of knowledge and experience, and they are used to communicate the self to others. As such, these identities are relational and carry “meaning within a chain of relationships” (Watson, 2006, p. 509). This allows teachers to vary how they portray themselves to their audience.

When identity is viewed as a performed construct that is fluid, temporal and relational, it creates opportunities to explore how people make sense of their lives. This sense-making process is captured in the “ongoing process of identification” that people display when they speak about themselves or their experiences (Watson, 2006, pp. 509-510). These identities show how people are connected to the world around them because they portray internal and external representations of the self. People construct identities to share who they think they are or how they would like to be known by others. These identities also allow people to perceive and place others in relation to themselves. For example, people may adopt more agreeable identities to fit into different conversations.

Since identities are performed, they can provide clues to how teachers position themselves when they are confronted with challenges. Teaching is a form of “emotional labour” that requires teachers to adopt external “goals and agendas” (Hargreaves, 1998b, p. 841). When identity work is used to investigate how teachers cope with these challenges, they make visible the internal conflicts teachers may go through when they minimise their own feelings, values or beliefs in order to realise external agendas. They can show the strain that teachers are under when they act in contradiction to personal ideologies. As demonstrated in Mary’s story, these identities helped her to justify contradictory actions and allowed her to distance herself from impositions that she disagreed with. She may have used these identities to cope with feelings of helplessness or conflict.

Through Mary's story, I was able to accentuate the potential repercussions of implementing teacher inquiry rigidly. To counter these conflicts, teachers can be granted sufficient levels of autonomy over their inquiries. When teachers have more autonomy, they may experience more meaningful inquiries and learning experiences. In the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle, Timperley et al. (2007) envisioned teacher inquiry as a self-regulated form of learning that provides teachers with the ability to inquire individually and collectively (p. xliv). In this vision of inquiry, teachers act autonomously as learners and practitioners.

When teacher inquiry is implemented through a collective approach, teachers can develop purposeful relationships with their peers and school leaders. These collegial ties can help to "demystify professional work and build alliances" (Sachs, 2001, p. 152). To Sachs (2001), building alliances may lead teachers towards a more democratic vision of professionalism because these connections provide teachers and other educational stakeholders with the impetus to work together. These alliances can induce substantive discussions on practice and lead towards negotiated visions of teaching. Such a shared approach can motivate teachers to become more active in educational change, which can cause teachers to feel more valued and respected as participants.

Encouraging teachers to view themselves in agentic roles could provoke them to inquire into their practice differently. Timperley et al. (2007) postulated that teacher learning can play a major role in improving students learning because it can be used to convince teachers that they need to take more responsibility for student learning (p. xliv). It is assumed that teachers can better understand this responsibility when they inquire into their practice and see the impact of their actions in terms of student learning. The teacher inquiry movement is also an attempt to place a heightened focus on improving the learning of priority students (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Alton-Lee, 2003; Timperley et al., 2007). The Education Review Office

(2012c, p. 1) reports on teacher inquiry highlighted this social justice purpose more prominently than the cycles or models that have been associated with teacher inquiry.

Perhaps intensified efforts to connect teacher inquiry to the learning of priority students could give teachers a stronger incentive to inquire differently. Establishing this link between teacher inquiry and priority students would attach a stronger sense of urgency and justification for inquiry. This could be encouraged by highlighting the collective impact of teaching, which could make teachers more receptive to professional learning collaborations. Since these collaborative engagements can transform the way that teachers conduct and experience teacher inquiry, these collaborations will change how teachers perceive themselves as teachers, learners, and professionals.

In this discussion, I attempted to locate teachers' identity work in the complex space that houses personal and professional motivations, expectations and demands. Since teachers work within this entangled confluence of external and internal influences, they are exposed to the forces of historical, economic, political, social and cultural agendas, which may contradict their ethical and moral motivations to teach. In this space, teachers use temporal identities to negotiate between personal and professional identities. Since these temporal identities are self-constructed, they give teachers the ability to control how they would like to be seen by others. When teachers shift between these identities, they share how they view themselves within a "power network" (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). In repressive or rigid teaching cultures, teachers will be more prone to describing themselves passively and conversely, they will adopt more agentic identities when they perceive a strong sense of autonomy.

Since teachers use identity work to represent their "motivation, efficacy, commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness" (Day, 2002, p. 679), these identities enable teachers to express authentic and fabricated positions to others. In terms of teacher inquiry, identity work can be

explored further to gain useful insights into teachers' self- image and their conceptualisation of teacher inquiry. These insights might provide helpful suggestions that can strengthen the way that teachers experience teacher inquiry.

## **Molly – Critical Thinking**

I recruited Molly through a doctoral student who was also a school principal. When we met, she was transitioning into her new role as a vice-principal. Even though we were strangers when we met at a café, it was not difficult to identify her when she walked into the café because she had a bulging folder and a copy of the Teachers' Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration under her arm. We had developed an easy rapport and our two-hour interview flew by very quickly.

One of the strongest memories I have of our conversation was flipping through her professional learning and development folder. I felt as if I was looking at a photo album of her teacher learning endeavours because it reminded me of a nostalgic walk down memory lane. I remember pausing periodically to seek clarification about photos, paragraphs and different forms of evidence she had accumulated in her folder. When I reflected on these moments, it became apparent to me that she construed teacher inquiry as a yearly project. While these projects contained personal meaning and significance, they lacked continuity because she pursued different topics each year. Since they were motivated by personal interests, she spoke very fondly of them and recalled them with a high level of enthusiasm.

Molly conceived teacher inquiry as a valuable part of the teaching process and professional growth. Despite acknowledging that formalisation was an imposition, she described teacher inquiry as an opportunity to improve practice according to student needs and to build professional relationships with colleagues. She described teacher inquiry to be a professional responsibility because teacher inquiry was a mandated form of teacher learning, a form of teacher evaluation and a requirement in the teacher certification process. These integrated purposes caused her to characterise teacher inquiry as a personal form of teacher learning that was professionally recognised.



### *Formal, Personal and Professional Teacher Inquiry*

*Teacher inquiry is personal education, reflection and building on your own knowledge. The bit that I loved was that your individual inquiry was based on criteria. Your inquiry had to be based on something that would affect student outcomes. It had to be a formal, personal, professional inquiry that would directly impact children in your class. It might be something that you have strength in and want to develop, or a need that has arisen from the dynamics of the children in your class that you want to further or something specifically associated with school targets like raising student achievement in Maths. Some of my colleagues have done a lot of research around introducing writing to new entrants and it has changed the way they do it. The whole idea is that it affects your pedagogy in a way that is going to increase student outcomes. I buy into that completely. I think it is amazing to require registered teachers to ensure that they are addressing an area of their PD [professional development] with no imposition every year.*

Molly captured multiple conceptions of teacher inquiry when she defined it as a formal, personal, professional inquiry. She was passionate about it because it was a mandated form of teacher learning that she found to be realistic and beneficial. It is a formal requirement because it is part of teachers' performance appraisals at schools. Schools integrated teacher inquiry into their performance management systems after the Education Review Office (2012a) suggested that this integration could promote a sustainable culture of inquiry.

When she spoke of the benefits of teacher inquiry, she spoke as a school leader and a teacher. As a school leader, she gave teachers the freedom to choose their own area of inquiry. To her, giving teachers the freedom to choose their own inquiry focus made teacher inquiry a personal form of teacher learning. She felt that this autonomy empowered teachers because it

allowed them to inquire into areas that differed from school-led professional development initiatives. Since she construed teacher inquiry as an interest-based approach to teacher learning, she concluded that teachers would experience more meaningful or applicable learning from their inquiries.

*You spend the first part of term one setting up your class in the first six weeks. You meet with your principal to say what your inquiry will be about and why. You are the advocate in the inquiry advocacy approach. The principal uses the inquiry process to help you dig deeper into your reasoning and to help you formulate a good inquiry question. Then you go away and write an action plan.*

*You go to your first meeting with your professional learning community in your first term. It is not your normal year team but a new team across the school that is a representational slice of the school. You get together and say, "This is what I am thinking of doing, why I am thinking of doing it and where I am heading with it." Then you go away and do some research. This meeting is about sharing what you want to do and having a discussion about it in a critical-friend circle which is the beauty of the professional learning community.*

*Your community asks you questions and you get the opportunity to present your thinking to an audience. They have to be there and are not allowed to interrupt while you are presenting which means you get to say everything that you want to say. Then they ask a whole lot of questions that help you clarify your thinking. That is the true advantage of the whole process of personal development because other people are helping you with your thinking.*

*At the start of term two, it is about establishing relationships, determining needs and implementing your plan. You have two meetings with your professional learning*

*community where two of you present in one meeting and the other two present in the next meeting. You are only presenting once in a term and you present some form of professional research that you have done. You do a literature review, show findings and experiments as your thinking is developing. You show whether you are deviating from your action plan or what your next steps are.*

*You bring along artifacts to show what you have been doing. Mine has been in folder form while others might do a poster, chart or a data board. This becomes part of your attestation process with your principal and part of your registered teacher process.*

*Then by the middle of term three, you are tying it all up because you do not want it on your plate for term four. In the fourth term, you type up how you think you have made a difference or how it was a complete disaster or how you have learnt that this is the best way forward.*

To her, teacher inquiry was a personal form of teacher learning in comparison to subject or school-wide professional development initiatives. She felt passionate about this form of teacher learning because she believed that it could be more practical and useful for teachers. She was particularly excited about creating purposeful conversations through professional learning communities. These communities could provide teachers with personal and professional support during the inquiry process. This communal approach to professional learning could foster stronger professional relationships.

Since she envisioned teacher inquiry as an individual project, it was important to build professional learning communities that provided teachers with increased opportunities to interact with each other. It seemed as if professional collaboration and collegiality were priorities. However, her conceptualisation of professional learning communities seemed to lack the collective structure that is characteristic of effective professional learning

communities (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 227). I also found it curious that she did not mention a shared understanding or a collective approach to teacher learning.

Perhaps she envisioned teacher inquiry as an individual project because teachers have to provide evidence of their inquiries to their school leaders, the Educational Review Office and the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand. She described teacher inquiry as a professional project that involved “research, [a] literature review, findings, critical friends and [an] action plan”. When she associated teacher inquiry with these terms, I concluded that she may have construed teacher inquiry to be a classroom action research project. This link between teacher inquiry and action research also appeared in Wylie and Bonne’s (2014) national survey of primary and intermediate schools where they grouped “teaching as inquiry” with action research (p. 31). In the Education Review Office (2012c) report on teacher inquiry, they described action research as one of the “most prevalent” forms of inquiry that teachers used to review their practices and programmes (p. 17).

I found this link between teacher inquiry and classroom action research intriguing. Mettetal (2012) defined classroom action research as a “method” of inquiry that teachers can use to improve student learning in their classrooms. This localised approach encourages teachers to inquire into practices that will suit the particular needs of their students. It adheres with the way that teacher inquiry has been promoted as a tool to evaluate the impact of teaching in terms of student learning. However, the “teaching as inquiry” cycle and model, and classroom action research depict inquiry as an individual process while the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle promotes the idea of collective inquiry.

According to Timperley et al. (2007), a collective inquiry approach is more sustainable because it encourages teachers to accept teaching as a collective responsibility. They portrayed teacher inquiry as a continuous approach to improvement. This continuous

approach to inquiry was alluded to by the Education Review Office (2012c), they depicted teacher inquiry more as a teaching mindset than a singular project. They promoted teacher inquiry as a “systematic and continuous” approach to examining teaching impact (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 9). These approaches that portray teacher inquiry as an ongoing initiative and differ from the yearly conception Molly had described.

*I was more nervous in the very first one I did because I was brand new to the school. I was also nervous about meeting the requirements of teacher inquiry rather than the actual inquiry. I knew that it was part of my attestation and that I would have to present it to my principal. I was so worried about what I was supposed to be doing and how involved it had to be that it became all about writing up the product.*

*Once I found my feet in the school, it became about what was going to be useful for me or having an impact because I was not going to go through all that bother to have no effect on children. At first, I thought it was just about PD but in time I realised it was also part of your appraisal and attestation for registered teacher criteria. It is all tied in but sometimes it takes a while for the purpose or links to filter through. It is all about accountability of you as a teacher. It is whether you are doing the best job that you can and part of that matter has to do with the child.*

*There is a whole layer of good quality professional teachers for whom that is all that they want. Come in, do the job, do it well, mark the box and go home. Of course most of these people are going to stay where they are and I do not mean in terms of hierarchy. These teachers have been teaching competently in the same way since they became teachers. For them, the next few years are going to be quite hard because they do not want to be a part of it. These people are kicking and screaming, resisting collaborative teaching because there is a whole heap of work that has to go into*

*modern learning practices such as research, PD and observations that they do not want to know about.*

*The schools where these things are not happening are going to be fewer and fewer because it is actually a moving tide and we have no choice but I think teacher inquiry is a mutual nurturing. It is actually a really nice experience after the first one.*

*Generally speaking it forms really good relationships amongst the staff across the school. I began talking to people that I had no contact with and formed a relationship.*

*Everything that I have said to you has just solidified in my mind the power of the professional dialogue within a cluster which is nurturing each other through collegiality and relationships as well as learning from each other.*

Her initial reservations with teacher inquiry hinted that her acceptance was a result of a gradual process of reasoning. Within this process of acceptance, she touched upon the acquiescence that teachers may display in educational reforms. When she described teaching to be susceptible to external impositions, she framed teachers as having little power to change or affect the moving tide of teaching. She believed that teachers needed to make sense of these impositions in order to survive the tide of change.

Since teacher inquiry was mandated for different reasons, she may have felt compelled to find different ways to make it a meaningful part of her practice. I think this sense of necessity changed when she conducted meaningful inquiries. This reminded me of the notion Guskey (2002) premised in his model of teacher change. He stated that teachers were more likely to change when they experienced professional learning that had “demonstrable results in terms of student learning outcomes” (p. 384). While this link between teacher learning, change and student outcomes provides a stronger justification for teacher learning, it also places greater pressure on teachers to demonstrate how their learning can enhance student learning.

### *Exploring the Undercurrents*

Molly displayed a strong sense of enthusiasm and passion for teacher inquiry. She felt that it was a promising form of teacher learning because it departed from other top-down forms of professional development. She construed teacher inquiry as a personal form of teacher learning that afforded teachers with high levels of autonomy over their learning process. Her conception of teacher inquiry as a personal form of teacher learning varied from the way that teacher inquiry had been promoted as a form of teacher learning in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle. In this cycle, student needs were used to inform teacher inquiry focuses rather than teachers' interests (Timperley et al., 2007).

Beneath her passionate stance, I also noted that she held an underlying belief that teachers played passive roles in the education system. She gave me the impression that teachers had limited power to resist impositions such as teacher inquiry. This understanding made me question if she described teacher inquiry as a personal learning model because she wanted to find a meaningful way to legitimise this mandated form of teacher learning. Perhaps this conceptualisation also allowed her to exhibit more ownership over professional learning.

When she described teaching as a moving tide, I pictured teachers as swimmers who were caught in educational rip currents. These metaphors portray teaching as a practice that is susceptible to the effect of external forces. However, instead of describing her powerlessness to resist changes, she positioned herself as a survivor or a swimmer in the currents of change. I interpreted this as a coping mechanism that gave her a sense of purpose and strength. When teachers swim with the currents of change, they "adapt to a reality that is thus not questioned" (Freire, 2012, p. 47). They adapt to survive changes and do little to question the changes that are being imposed. However, when teachers comprehend that "adaptation is only a moment in the process of *intervention*" (Freire, 2012, p. 47), they open themselves to recognising

alternative pathways. This comprehension can motivate them to become more critical of the forces that encroach upon their practice.

According to Freire (1998), teachers become more critical of their realities when they engage in acts of “epistemological curiosity” (p. 29). Epistemological curiosity engages the “critical mind” with the intuitive and affective selves (Freire, 1998, p. 30). It is a mindset that fosters an encompassing view of reality because it compels a deep “search for the reasons that things are as they are” (Freire, 1998, p. 77). When teachers nurture their epistemological curiosity, they develop critical thinking skills that compel them to question ingrained values, beliefs and practices. This kind of critical thinking can provoke teachers to challenge the status quo.

Without an understanding of the undercurrents of teaching, teachers limit themselves to adaptation and survival strategies. They may be less likely to pay attention to the encroaching forces that influence their practices. They leave themselves “vulnerable to policy decisions and research claims that may not be in their best interests or those of their students” (Thrupp, 2012, p. 308). Thrupp (2012) urged teachers to adopt a more “critical view of the educational politics” because teaching is shaped by social, historical, cultural and political agendas (p. 308). An understanding these agendas is useful because the undercurrents of teaching are motivated by particular visions of education.

When teachers understand this vision, they can make more informed decisions about the impact of educational policies. A discussion on critical thinking is applicable to teacher inquiry because teacher inquiry has been linked to calls for quality teaching and efforts to improve historical student underachievement (Alton-Lee, 2003; Education Review Office, 2012c; Timperley et al., 2007). These calls shift some of the responsibilities in improvement agendas upon teachers and schools. To promote this sense of responsibility in teacher inquiry, teachers were encouraged to view themselves as contributors to student underperformance



(Timperley et al., 2007, p. xliv). However, when teachers and schools are charged with the responsibility for student learning, it shifts the focus away from other contributing influences such as social economic status. Thrupp (2009) called this shifting part of the “politics of blame” where “governments attempt to construct student or institutional ‘underperformance’ or ‘failure’ as the clear responsibility of schools and teachers” (p. 6). In the “politics of blame”, the implications of “wider contextual issues such as social-economic factors” are downplayed (Thrupp, 2009, p. 6). When contextual issues are relegated, problem-based approaches that employ “school-based pedagogical or management solutions” are used to improve schooling issues (Thrupp, 2012, p. 311).

It would appear that teacher inquiry is underpinned by a problem-based approach to educational improvement. Since teacher inquiry and learning have been promoted with the belief that quality teaching can have “the greatest system influence” on student learning (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 1), teachers and school leaders have been persuaded to believe that teacher learning that is based on student needs can make a significant impact on student learning. Through teacher inquiry, teachers have been encouraged to focus on the impact of their teaching actions because this focus might enable them to improve the quality of their practice (Ministry of Education, 2007). These notions can affect how teacher conceptualise the purpose of teacher learning and the structure of professional learning. Additionally, they may lead teachers and school leaders to believe that they should shoulder more responsibility for student learning.

While school-based factors such as teaching can have an impact on student learning, a critical exploration of educational inequalities may reveal that there are deeper social issues. This angle exposes how student learning may be “constrained by the social disadvantages” that are beyond schools’ and teachers’ control (Thrupp, 2012, p. 309). This angle highlights that teaching and student learning can be influenced by historical, cultural or situational factors

that can advance or impede learning. In the next section, I will briefly outline factors that have contributed to the current teaching landscape and use these factors to justify a need for teachers to develop a more critical understanding of their professional context.

### *Developing a Critical Understanding*

When the education system was decentralised, it increased the need for administrative and managerial forms of accountability. The rise in professional accountability changed the way that teachers reported on their practices. In the early 1990s, there was a shift towards “educational standards” and “comprehensive assessments” to demonstrate teaching effectiveness (O'Neill, 2010, p. 3). This shift signalled that teachers were to bear increased responsibilities for student learning. It introduced calls for teachers to evaluate their teaching “capability” or “productivity” in terms of student learning (O'Neill, 2010, p. 6). These changes implied that teachers could be made to be more accountable for their actions. It normalised demands for teachers to demonstrate their “pedagogical responsiveness to individual learners” (O'Neill, 2010, p. 7). These changes provided the impetus to pay attention to the “quality of classroom teaching” and premised the idea that teachers could “make the most difference” in student learning (O'Neill, 2010, pp. 9,1). It allowed the Labour government (from 1999 to 2008) to discuss and demand more measurable learning results. This focus also placed teachers and their practices at the forefront of improvement policies.

One of the programmes used to support this focus on quality teaching was initiated through the Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis programme that was implemented in 2002. This programme promoted an evidence- and research-based approach to education. The syntheses published through this programme highlighted the need for quality teaching that could make an impact on student learning. This programme established teacher inquiry as a teacher learning initiative that could change the way that teachers learnt professionally.

In all three cycles and models used to promote teacher inquiry, emphasis is placed on teaching actions and professional learning that can make an impact on student learning. However, this focus on improving the quality of teaching is based on a problem-solving approach to student learning and school improvement. Such an approach limits the improvement agenda to school-based factors that contribute towards student learning because it does not include wider contextual factors that may affect student learning. If beyond-school factors are considered in initiatives to improve student learning, it can broaden and deepen efforts to improve student learning. For example, student learning can be examined differently through a critical lens.

Since learning is not limited to in-school experiences, a critical view allows teachers and school leaders to develop a more holistic and realistic understanding of their students' lives outside school. A critical approach provokes teachers and school leaders to explore and uncover complex issues that may affect the learning process. It may prompt them to consider the possibility that "educational inequalities reflected wider social inequalities" (Thrupp, 2009, p. 7). When teachers adopt a critical view of education, it can transform their teacher inquiries because they may become more sensitised to the larger implications of teaching.

They may become more receptive to the idea that teaching as a political act. This could compel them to consider the wider implications of their practice and the roles that they play in educational change. When teachers adopt a more critical stance of their educational contexts, they question how educational policies and practices contribute towards societal structures (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 13). They question the "dominant" or particular views of education that shape their professional context (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 36). These critical thoughts may cause them to view the purpose of teaching, learning and education differently, which will affect the way that they inquire into their practices. In their inquiries, they might

be interested in scrutinising their conceptualisations of teaching and learning to see how these are influenced by the educational discourse they have been exposed to.

When teachers adopt a more critical view of education, they may want to explore the implications of power differentials within the teaching and learning relationship, and the education system. It makes them more likely to consider “whom and on whose behalf they are working” for (Freire, 1985a, p. 180). These explorations could influence teachers to become more critical of policies and more resistant to unreasonable improvement agendas. When teachers are more critical of their educational context, they will be more inclined to challenge unrealistic demands and responsibilities that have been placed upon them by others.

When teachers analyse the purpose of policies, they may find themselves developing a different view education. Thrupp (2012) argued that a critical perspective of education equips teachers with the ability to “defend themselves against unreasonable claims that they are not adequately performing” (p. 309). For example, when teachers adopt a critical mindset, they may be more prone to challenge the notion that they are not providing quality teaching. It is important to note that adopting a critical stance does not diminish teachers’ responsibility for student learning but rather it enhances their appreciation for the complexity of learning and teaching. When teachers adopt a critical mindset, they investigate and consider a wider range of factors that may be hindering their students’ learning progress.

In the push for learning improvement, evidence- and research-based practices have been established as effective ways to improve teaching practices (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Education Review Office, 2012c; Ministry of Education, 2007; Timperley et al., 2007).

Within this push, research findings have been used to build a convincing argument for quality teaching and practices. Missing from this argument is the notion that research is a value-laden

endeavour that is shaped by personal agendas, politics or research methodologies (Thrupp, 2009, p. 310). Thus, in order for teachers to develop a more informed and balanced understanding of their roles in improvement agendas, they will need to develop the skills and knowledge to be critical of research findings. This enables them to critically examine research claims that have been used to support and promote educational policies.

A critical mindset enables teachers to comprehend how political, economic, cultural, historical and social agendas permeate the education system. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001), a critical approach to inquiry can transform teacher learning. When teachers become critical inquirers of research “knowledge, its relationships to practice and the purposes of schooling”, they become more integral in the process of educational change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 50). In their vision of “inquiry as stance”, they outlined how teachers could play participatory roles in educational and social change. They envisaged that a collective approach to inquiry could provide teachers and other educational stakeholders with deeper insights into educational challenges. Inquiry as stance encourages teachers to inquire into their particular challenges but remain connected to wider educational discourse (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 288). This type of teacher inquiry enables teachers to remain focused on local issues but be critically aware of the external forces that influence the conception, management and dissemination of educational knowledge. Their conceptualisation of inquiry depicts teaching as a social and collective responsibility that compels teachers to remain critically engaged in knowledge construction.

### **Simon – Purposeful Inquiry**

Simon and I belonged to the same club. I approached him when I discovered that he was a primary school teacher. Initially, he declined to participate but changed his mind after several months. When I interviewed him, he was a provisionally-registered teacher who had just completed his first year of full-time teaching. I managed to arrange our interview during the last week of school and caught him in a reflective state of mind. Even though he was exhausted, he was excited to describe what he had learnt throughout the year.

Since we were already acquainted, we spoke in a relaxed manner for ninety minutes. I felt more comfortable asking him open and honest questions about teacher inquiry because we had an established rapport. This rapport enabled me to provoke deeper discussion of his experience and may have encouraged him to air some of his uncertainties about teaching and teacher inquiry. When he discussed some of the tensions he heard from more experienced colleagues, I wondered if these tensions surfaced because it was the first year that his school had implemented teacher inquiry. Perhaps the formal expectations attached to teacher inquiry could have exacerbated these tensions because he described teacher inquiry as a process of documentation that fulfilled professional learning, teacher evaluation and certification requirements.

He believed that teacher inquiry was meaningful because it foregrounded the need and importance of getting to know his students. He valued the practical insights that he gained from inquiring into particular students. He believed that teacher inquiry gave him a valid reason to approach his more experienced colleagues. These professional dialogues enriched his understanding of teaching and learning and became a source of practical and experiential knowledge. They enabled him to connect professionally and personally with his colleagues. This formal connection enabled him to discuss and reflect on the challenges of teaching with

others. Even though he thoroughly enjoyed his inquiry experience, his enthusiasm wavered slightly when I probed into his purpose and motivation to inquire. This is where he began to reflect more on the hesitations or frustrations that he experienced during inquiry.

### *Going Through the Motions*

*In my teacher inquiry, we focused on particular students because we were told we needed to find three students. One needed to be an inquiry student in writing, mathematics and the third one was our choice. As my choice, I chose Mary because she was very quiet. She had major changes in her life and was new to the school. She was a very timid girl so I wanted to focus and work on her social skills. She was upset and in tears at the beginning of every day but would get over it as the day progressed. In the beginning, I did look at Mary at face value because I did not consider her background. I thought she was just a nervous kid. I thought I would not have enough information to draw from because you can test Maths and have a baseline to work from but you cannot test social skills. I started to make close contact with her parents to let them know that this was happening so I got data through emails. There were completely different family dynamics in addition to her moving to a new city, school and class. Based on the advice from other colleagues, I pushed for her to get some relationships inside and outside the classroom.*

Since Simon experienced teacher inquiry in a structured manner, he conceived teacher inquiry as a formal need to investigate, address and document the needs of particular students. He found this attention on particular students valuable because it prompted him to make more concerted efforts to get to know them and their needs. Although he associated teacher inquiry with particular students, he did not define these students as priority students. At his school, teacher inquiry was structured by different subject areas and teacher choices.

*In term four, we did a fifteen minute speech about one particular child out of the three. We were broken into thirds for our presentation so that each group ranged in experiences and year levels. I presented on Billy and his writing because I thought he was more interesting. There were multiple lessons around the purpose of writing because of him. I probably would not have taught that way if it had not been for Billy.*

*I said to a colleague that my kids do not seem to care but I was told to tell them why they are doing it, what it is going to do for them in the future and why are they doing it right now in school. That is something I took for granted when I first started. I thought they were doing it because they had to but in their own little world, they needed to have some kind of reason behind it.*

*I learnt that no one should be put in a situation where they do something without them knowing why. These little things that you do not ask for make meaningful big lessons. At first I worried about what this was going to do for the other 23 kids in the classroom because I had to do more work around these kids. This also allowed me to pick the brains of other teachers so that I could be more prepared for other kids later down the track.*

He felt that teacher inquiry provided him with opportunities to approach his colleagues freely. It normalised conversations about practice and encouraged him to speak about the challenges he faced in his classroom. Some of these conversations compelled him to uncover underlying assumptions about teaching and learning because they challenged his values and beliefs about students, learning and teaching. While some of these conversations may have been difficult, he felt that his colleagues offered useful advice on teaching. I believe that he regarded these conversations as significant professional learning moments. His experience exposed how a social approach to teacher learning can provide novice teachers with a supportive and



practical network. Vygotsky depicted this process as scaffolded learning that novices experience when they are guided by more knowledgeable others in the “zone of proximal development” (Eun, 2008, p. 142). According to Eun (2008), teacher learning happens through “social interactions, or the intermental plane, between and among people” (p. 145). Professional relationships played a crucial role in Simon’s experience because he felt that they enabled him to learn and grow professionally. His colleagues gave him the encouragement and constructive criticism that he needed to challenge his practice.

*From this speech, I should have had his information written in my template so that I could have just been reading from it. You plan to reflect on action plans to see if yesterday's plan worked but in reality that does not happen all the time. I think it is up to us to make sure we are documenting all the time that but in reality I am backlogging all my stuff. I am writing it down because I have to but I have also spent a lot of time reflecting on my inquiry students with my principal. We also met formally once a term because she was my group leader. These inquiry-student conversations have helped me get to know my kids more.*

*We also do this thing called “speed dating” where we get the next year's teacher to listen to us rant for one minute about the kids they will have from my class. All this information will be forwarded to Mary’s next teacher. This learning journey informs our planning and keeps me more aware but from what I have observed, it tends to be the tricky kids that become inquiry kids like a label slapped on them. My school wants to get into a system where they can have children’s learning journeys put into Google Docs format and have cumulative files.*

While he conversed frequently with his colleagues about his inquiry, he struggled to capture the evidence, thoughts or reflections of his inquiry. Since these conversations may have been

conducted informally, the outcomes were rarely documented in his written inquiry. Thus, when he described the written part of his inquiry, it sounded like an individual experience. In his inquiry, he experimented with different ways to improve his inquiry students' learning experiences. It sounded as if he used the written part of his inquiry to highlight how he had made an impact on his inquiry students. Even though he believed in the benefits of inquiring into student needs, he had concerns about how his school was planning to use the written part of teacher inquiry.

He inquired into Mary's needs because he perceived that she required more emotional and social support than other students. In his inquiry, he discovered intimate details about her background and developed a closer relationship with her parents. This home-school link enabled him to better understand how he could help her acclimatise to a new environment. He stated that his social focus on Mary was unique because other teachers tended to focus on subject areas or problematic behaviours. He was particularly concerned that a focus on problematic behaviours could create a negative impression of inquiry students. His concern alluded to the potential pitfalls of associating teacher inquiry to particular students.

*I am still pretty grey about the purpose behind teacher inquiry. There have been moments where it has been very useful and there have also been a lot of moments where I question why we have to do this. I feel like this is paperwork that we do not need even though I get quite excited about it because I like getting to know kids. I like that journey with them, figuring them out and seeing how I can use that later. I am so green to this job but if they had introduced this three years from now, I would probably say that we do not need it. I am in the hype of new career so I am just going with it. You could probably just lump a heap of stuff on me and I certainly would not complain because it is all well and good to have opportunities to be able to reflect deeply on kids. I think about getting registered so doing this is quite important to me*

*as part of the registration process. It seems like a lot of experienced teachers have to make all their paperwork up to scratch for their registration because part of all this paperwork feeds into that. The year of inquiring has been pretty rewarding and teacher inquiry is part and parcel of my whole teaching experience.*

When I asked him to reflect on the purpose of teacher inquiry, our conversation took on a more questioning tone. He began questioning if there was a real need for teacher inquiry and if his enthusiasm for teacher inquiry would last. He voiced his frustrations with the written part of the inquiry process and questioned the purpose of generating documentation. I felt that his frustrations were connected to how he construed meaning within the inquiry process. He may have felt that the written part of teacher inquiry was unnecessary because it could not adequately capture the insights that he had gained from speaking to his colleagues.

Since he seemed uncertain about the overarching purpose of teacher inquiry, I concluded that he may not have questioned the purpose of teacher inquiry prior to our conversation. I also do not believe that he voiced his uncertainties to others because he felt that his frustrations were miniscule in comparison to the tensions other teachers were grappling with. He gave me the impression that other teachers may have construed teacher inquiry as a form of compliance rather than an opportunity to learn from practice. According to the Education Review Office (2012c), school leaders play a critical role in ensuring that teachers have “good levels of support and guidance” to conduct consequential inquiries (p. 22). Even though his school leaders had implemented a structured and supportive approach to teacher inquiry, they may have placed less emphasis on making the purpose of teacher inquiry explicit. This lack of emphasis may have made it more difficult for teachers to embrace teacher inquiry as a useful form of teacher learning.

### *Detecting Hairline Fractures*

Simon was generally positive and optimistic about his teaching and teacher inquiry experiences. I believe that these feelings were attributed to the professional relationships that he had developed throughout the year. These relationships enabled him to gain situated, timely and meaningful advice on teaching and learning. He believed that this supportive system was an integral part of the teacher inquiry process. His lack of clarity about the purpose of teacher inquiry led me to believe that he conceptualised teacher inquiry more as a professional responsibility rather than a form of teacher learning. He may have treated teacher inquiry as one of many responsibilities that he had to grow accustomed to as a teacher. Additionally, this acceptance may have made him less aware of teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning.

There were also signs that he construed teacher inquiry as a form of compliance. It sounded as if the most important part of teacher inquiry was the reflective conversations he had with his colleagues. He used his school's online performance management system to share ongoing reflective thoughts with others. In addition to these reflective thoughts, he had to complete a report on each of his inquiry students. This report was structured by school term and contained a summary of the actions he took and the outcomes of his actions. Since this report was a formal expectation, it carried a stronger sense of compliance in comparison to the ongoing conversations or reflections he had. Perhaps this led to the general impression that teacher inquiry was a necessity rather than a beneficial form of teacher learning.

I imagined his concerns as hairline fractures in his nascent impression of teacher inquiry. Since hairline fractures are miniscule breaks in the bone, they are often hard to detect. However, when fractures are left unattended, they have the potential to increase in severity and intensity over time. This metaphor represents the uncertainties or frustrations that Simon

had with teacher inquiry. I believe that he did not discuss his views openly with others because he felt that he had to maintain a positive and enthusiastic disposition as a beginning teacher. When he opened up, it made me realise that teachers may withhold their views from others to appear more confident and agreeable to imposed change.

I found Simon's lack of clarity about the purpose of teacher inquiry fascinating because it contrasted the memorable professional learning moments he associated with teacher inquiry. I spent some time assuring him that there was value in exploring his opinions and feelings because they were valid aspects of his experience even though they were negative. He may have felt hesitant about voicing his uncertainties because he did not want to give me a negative view of his school, colleagues or teacher inquiry experiences.

His frustrations reminded me of the "Teachers of Promise" project that was conducted throughout New Zealand. In this longitudinal study, new teachers were studied over the period of seven years (Cameron & Lovett, 2015). This project highlighted that teaching longevity was related to a strong "understanding teachers' views" (Cameron & Lovett, 2015, p. 161). When teachers felt valued, supported and integrated into the vision of education promoted by their schools, they were more likely to be satisfied and motivated to remain teaching. Another way to engage teachers is to generate opportunities for teachers to learn and grow professionally. In Simon's story, he experienced meaningful professional learning and growth even though he did not understand the purpose of inquiry. This challenged me to consider how teacher inquiry can be structured to create worthwhile learning experiences for teachers. In the next section, I explore various ideas that could deepen teachers' conception of teacher inquiry. This exploration gives me the opportunity to reflect and revisit some of the justifications for teacher inquiry.

### *Extending the Purpose of Inquiry*

As argued, the social justice motivations that undergird teacher inquiry cycles and models may need stronger emphasis if teachers are to conceptualise teacher inquiry as a means to improve the learning of priority students. In Simon's story, this emphasis on priority students was not evident. This lack of emphasis could be because he taught at a decile-ten school. At a decile-ten school, there may be fewer priority students, which might explain the subject-based structure of his inquiry. Perhaps this also contributed to a less justifiable motivation for teacher inquiry, which could have influenced the compliance-related views he mentioned. These factors could have led him and perhaps some of his colleagues to construe teacher inquiry as a form of compliance rather than an opportunity to learn professionally.

Providing opportunities to discuss the underlying purpose for teacher inquiry may help teachers to better conceptualise the purpose of inquiry. Highlighting the situational structure of teacher inquiry could further clarify the benefits of a practice-based approach to teacher learning. When teacher learning is situated, it is grounded in localised practices and knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Teacher inquiry enables teachers to participate in teacher learning that can provide them with contextually-, historically-, socially- and culturally-bound professional learning experiences. This localised approach enables teachers to address issues that affect their particular setting and makes teacher learning a relevant and timely experience. However, this form of participation appeared to be missing in Simon's story because there seemed to be more emphasis on teacher inquiry as a form of teacher evaluation than teacher learning. Perhaps further discussion on how teacher inquiry feeds into other professional development initiatives could have given him a more global understanding of how teacher inquiry fits into the school's overall professional learning and development plans.

In the Education Review Office (2012c) report on teacher inquiry, they made explicit suggestions of how school leaders could implement purposeful inquiry. They made it evident that school leaders needed to cultivate a culture of critical awareness. One of the ways to do this would be to provide teachers with ample opportunities and time to develop critical thinking skills. A critical mindset compels teachers to investigate and evaluate the “evidential basis” of the teaching strategies they use (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 16).

Encouraging teachers to inquire collaboratively can help them to develop a more critical attitude towards teaching. When teachers discuss their practice with others, it helps them to deprivatise and normalise conversations about teaching (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 26). These cultures provide teachers with the supportive and professional climate to inquire meaningfully. It would appear that a critical approach to teaching underpins the teacher inquiry process. This critical approach challenges teachers to scrutinise the underlying values, beliefs and philosophies that shape their practice.

When Simon inquired into Billy’s writing, he uncovered ingrained assumptions he had about student learning and teaching. These assumptions led him to investigate how he could better structure his approach to writing. He took explicit steps to make writing a purposeful learning activity but it is unclear if these changes generated an impact or produced visible improvements in terms of student learning. Even though this appeared to be a significant professional learning moment to Simon, he may not have captured this learning moment in his teacher inquiry report or reflections because these changes were about his professional growth. When these growth and learning reflections dominate the reported outcomes of teachers’ professional development initiatives, it makes it difficult to gauge how teacher learning has made an impact on student learning (Hattie, 2009, p. 119). This is the challenge within teacher inquiry, to make teacher learning a means to make a measurable impact on student learning.

Simon's story highlighted how teacher inquiry can provoke teachers to confront and change acritical practices. This change is one of the intended outcomes of teacher inquiry, to inquire and change routinised practices that may not be beneficial to students (Education Review Office, 2012c, p. 25). When teachers inquire into the impact of their actions on student learning, they may gain a clearer understanding of the roles that they play in student learning. According to Timperley et al. (2007), substantive inquiries can compel teachers to understand how they have played contributory roles in educational inequalities (p. xlv). While this may hold some truth, it is equally important to note that "no pedagogy is neutral" (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 13) because teaching is a social and relational practice that is influenced by larger forces. Since no pedagogy is neutral, it is possible that these inequitable practices are a sign of larger social inequalities. If teachers entertain this possibility, they may feel compelled to inquire into the social implications of their thoughts and actions. These motivations could enable teachers to delve deeper into the complexity of teaching, learning and education. Such a focus can widen the scope of teacher inquiry and propel teachers to develop a more critical view of education.

A critical approach to teacher inquiry encourages teachers to develop their epistemological curiosity. According to Freire (1998), epistemological curiosity stimulates a reasoned and critical examination of reality. This examination may motivate teachers to investigate the sources of their underlying beliefs, values and practices. When teachers nurture their epistemological curiosity, they may realise how their teaching actions and inquiries can have educational and social change implications. A critical form of teacher inquiry can challenge how teachers view themselves in the education system by highlighting the deeper responsibilities of education. This may cause teachers to be more attuned to the social justice intentions underpinning teacher inquiry, which can urge teachers to think differently about



themselves, their values, beliefs and motivations to inquire. It may cause teachers to adopt more critical positions towards the educational agendas that are imposed upon them.

To illustrate how teachers can play more prominent and critical roles in the education system, I draw upon the work of Paulo Freire. Freire (1972) theorised ways to promote “education as the practice of freedom” (p. 54). He encouraged teachers to immerse themselves in “intellectually rigorous” teacher learning because it helps to develop their capacity and knowledge for social change (Freire, 1998, p. 4). These intellectual pursuits enable teachers to critically examine themselves in relation to entrenched educational norms and structures. By framing education as a “problem-posing” opportunity, he urged teachers to think differently about pedagogical approaches (Freire, 1972). A problem-posing approach to education promotes an “education of questions” where learning is stimulated through inquiry, debate and discovery (Freire, 1997, p. 31). Teachers find ways to stimulate their students’ critical thinking skills in order for them to engage in “reflection and action upon reality” (Freire, 1972, p. 56). In this vision of education, education becomes a means to reduce oppression and inequality.

Since teachers play a prominent role in this vision, they must become critical thinkers. They develop a critical approach to education that enables them to foster their students’ capacity to participate in the world curiously and critically. When teachers have a critical mindset, they empower their students to become “co-investigators” of the world (Freire, 1972, p. 54). They find ways to encourage creativity and criticality so that their students can engage “in the world and with the world” (Freire, 1997, p. 34). When people engage “with the world”, they develop a “dialectical relationship” with reality (Freire, 1997, p. 34). This dialectical relationship exposes the transformative roles people can adopt to cause social change.

When teachers adopt a critical mindset, they are motivated to act on their inherent capacity to change reality. In this vision of education, teachers use their teaching praxis as the “*raison d’être*” of education (Freire, 1972, p. 41). When teachers view their practice as a vehicle for change, they refuse to accept static conceptions of themselves and reality. They believe that education can be used to promote egalitarianism.

Freire’s work on educational transformation reflected the hope that education could be used to change unjust social structures. His alternative envisioning of reality is premised by the belief that life is a fluid process of “becoming” (Freire, 1972, p. 57). This philosophy allows living to be construed in terms of possibilities. He theorised that people were “unfinished, uncompleted beings” existing in an “unfinished reality” (Freire, 1972, p. 57). When living is construed as a state of incompleteness, it allows for reality to be imagined differently. These notions provide opportunity to conceptualise the roles that teachers play in the education system differently.

In most educational structures, teachers’ practices are susceptible to larger social, cultural, political and economic agendas. These agendas shape the educational policies that position teachers within the system. While these positions may be entrenched, when reality is conceived to be fluid, teachers can be encouraged to challenge these conceptions. This shift can occur when teachers engage in open and critical dialogue about education. When dialogue is used to stimulate “curiosity and unrest” (Freire, 1997, p. 99), it becomes a dialogic exploration. This exploration can facilitate the “*emergence of consciousness and crucial intervention in reality*” (Freire, 1972, p. 54). These critical conversations could stimulate deep questions about existing forms of knowing and knowledge.

If teacher inquiry could foster deep and critical examinations of practice, it could provide teachers with opportunities to question their entrenched ways of understanding themselves,

their practices, the purpose of education and their reality. These examinations could nurture their epistemological curiosity and enable them to problematise their actions, thoughts and philosophies. When teacher inquiry is implemented as a tool to develop teachers' critical thinking skills and awareness of reality, it could further the purpose and vision of teacher inquiry.

# **Part Four: Impressions**

## **Revisiting the Questions**

Focusing on Student Needs

Teacher Autonomy and Motivation

Acknowledging Qualitative and Quantitative Changes

Teacher Identities and Change

Learning about Learning

Teachers as Learners

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Promoting Criticality

Summing Up

## **Closing One Door and Opening Others**

The Spirit of Exploration

Continuing the Story

## **Part Four: Impressions**

I embarked on a learning experience that has changed my views on teaching, student and teacher learning, and education. In this process, I learnt to recognise the power and potential within narratives, and the process of storying experience. I used teacher stories to develop different aspects of teacher inquiry. I achieved this by reconstructing stories that illuminated the idiosyncratic meanings that eleven teachers ascribed to their inquiries. These meanings created space for me to pose further questions about teacher inquiry. They also demonstrated that teacher voice is a legitimate way to study and understand the impact of policies. Since teacher voice is often silenced in educational policies, it is my hope that my research can inspire others to find new ways to make teacher voice more prominent in educational research.

Grounding my work in a narrative way of knowing and narrative truths allowed me to accentuate teachers as valuable, credible and authoritative storytellers of educational reforms such as teacher inquiry. In this thesis, I placed the “lives and stories of teachers” at the center of my inquiry because I wanted to honour their lived insights (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 362). Instead of locating their voices within existing research literature, I used their voices to create a lived impression of teacher inquiry. These storied perspectives offered glimpses into subtler and perhaps even shaded aspects of teacher inquiry.

In this study, I showed that teachers pay attention to their students’ needs and learning. I highlighted how teachers inquired formally and informally into their practices to demonstrate that they were cognisant of the potential impact that they have on their students’ learning and lives. Their stories foregrounded the professional learning efforts, challenges, and tensions that teachers experience when they inquire into themselves and their practices. In this contribution to knowledge, I argued that teachers can play a pivotal role in improvement

agendas such as teacher inquiry. However, when these improvement agendas are implemented with a rigid and parochial vision of teacher learning, they could circumscribe the meaning and value of teacher inquiry and professional learning experiences.

The montage of teacher inquiry portrayed in this thesis supplements existing ways of conceptualising teacher inquiry. Adopting an unconventional approach to studying teacher inquiry generated alternative connections, questions and theorisations. This unconventional approach brought forth internal and external implications, considerations and challenges around teacher inquiry.

In this closing narrative, I stepped back from the vivid images that I constructed in the previous section. By stepping backwards, I gained impressionistic views of the teacher inquiry puzzle from varying distances and angles. I used these impressions to accentuate themes that warrant further attention. These themes might be helpful to school leaders, teacher leaders, teacher-learning facilitators and policy makers who have a vested interest in shaping teacher inquiry into a sustainable form of teacher learning.

### **Revisiting the Questions**

Teachers are at the heart of successful educational reforms. When reforms encourage teachers to embrace new practices, change existing attitudes or teaching practices, it can cause intellectual and emotional turmoil. To ameliorate the potential turmoil, more attention can be placed on informing and improving efforts to support teachers through the process of change. This study allowed me to theorise different ways of realising this goal. Listening to stories about teacher inquiry increased my awareness of the varied approaches that have been used to implement teacher inquiry. I used these storied perspectives to clarify what teachers may need to make teacher inquiry a more profound professional learning experience. Realising

this goal is crucial if teacher inquiry is to live up to its potential as a form of teacher learning that can make an impact on student learning.

I believe that teacher inquiry departs from other traditional top-down forms of teacher learning because it is a situated form of teacher learning that encourages teachers to venture beyond their existing practices. I chose to investigate teacher inquiry through a narrative lens because I wanted to understand how teachers were coping with this way of learning. I wanted to highlight how teachers had been affected by this change. I adopted an appreciative stance towards teachers' experiences because I wanted to explore how teachers could be better supported in their inquiries and learning endeavours. In these explorations, I found ideas that could enhance the embedded motivations undergirding the teacher inquiry movement. I believe that these suggestions can strengthen the learning that teachers derive from inquiry because they promote professional growth that can ultimately benefit student learning.

These aims influenced my central research question, "How can teacher inquiry be conceptualised from teachers' experiences?" To answer this question, I composed two sub-questions. In my first sub-question, "What are teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry?" I emphasised the subjective meaning in teachers' experiences and gave prominence to their voices. In my second sub-question, "What insights into teacher inquiry can be gained from applying a deconstructive lens on teachers' inquiry experiences?" I examined their experiences further through deconstructive lenses.

In my first sub-question, I captured the multifaceted ways that teachers conceptualised teacher inquiry. I reconstructed their stories to expose and accentuate their idiosyncratic perceptions of teacher inquiry. In these stories, I brought forth situational, social, political, cultural, historical and contextual factors that permeated their teaching lives. I used these stories to celebrate their individual voices and the personal meanings that they attached to

teacher inquiry. My aim was to honour the main messages that teachers wanted to convey about their inquiry experiences.

In my second sub-question, I departed from the central ideas that teachers highlighted in their stories. In these deconstructive explorations, I pursued elements that were not as pronounced within their stories and illuminated issues, notions and areas that warranted deeper consideration. These questions that guided my thinking allowed me to develop composite images of the teacher inquiry puzzle. When these images were juxtaposed, they created a montage of teacher inquiry in New Zealand.

I am cognisant that this montage raises more questions than answers. In this study, I have only just begun to scratch the surface of the teacher inquiry puzzle; there is still much to explore and understand. Perhaps this desire to understand will be my lifelong quest as a teacher, learner and researcher. In the next section, I will discuss the impressions that I have gained from my work. These impressions are not comprehensive; they represent nascent questions that require further thinking.

### *Focusing on Student Needs*

When beginning teachers inquired, they tended to focus on getting to know their students and their students' learning needs. These stories indicated that teachers may focus on particular student populations at different times for different reasons. For example, Simon experienced teacher inquiry as a school-based experience. He defined his inquiry students according to the subject-based structure implemented in his school. In Lisa's and Gemma's course-based inquiry projects, they were asked to inquire specifically into the needs of priority students. They took the focus on priority students as an implicit reason to inquire into their practice. While experienced teachers also inquired to understand their students, some construed inquiry to be an ingrained part of their teaching practice while others regarded inquiry as a



formal initiative. Regardless of how they conceptualised teacher inquiry, all eleven teachers believed in the value of inquiring into their students' needs.

In regards to using teacher inquiry to promote the learning of priority students, as suggested by the Education Review Office (2012c) and Timperley et al. (2007, p. xlv), Laurie and Maggie indicated that this was occurring. Since Anna and Cat, Tammy and Mary taught at lower-decile schools, this focus was implicit. However, this emphasis on priority students was less evident in higher-decile schools. In higher-decile schools, teachers seemed to focus on lower-performing students or students who required additional attention and support. There was not an evident emphasis on particular student populations. These differences would suggest that teachers' inquiry experiences can vary according to the way that teacher inquiry is implemented at schools and the student populations they teach. If teacher inquiry is construed as a way to pay focused attention to student populations who may benefit from additional attention or support, it would appear that this is happening.

When teacher inquiry is linked to formal expectations, it appeared that these inquiries were more likely to focus on a small number of students. It would seem that teachers who inquired informally were more likely to inquire into the needs of more students. These teachers inquired informally because they wanted to understand the needs of the whole class rather than particular student populations. Perhaps this focus on the needs of the whole class is the eventual goal of an inquiry-driven approach to teaching that has yet to filter through to formal teacher inquiries.

### *Teacher Autonomy and Motivation*

Molly and Brian construed teacher inquiry as a personal but professional form of teacher learning. They had high levels of independence and were able to design and inquire into areas and students of their choosing. Other teachers experienced more rigid forms of inquiry that

were tied to school-wide or subject focuses. Their inquiry process may have been structured more formally, which could have limited their abilities to inquire beyond established areas.

Teachers described strong autonomy over their inquiries when they inquired informally. These inquiries were depicted as a habitual or natural stance towards teaching. They described informal teacher inquiry as an effective way to determine how best to cater to their students' needs. These teachers alluded that formalisation efforts had not affected the way that they conceptualised inquiry because inquiry was personal, but also professional. For example, Anna and Cat stated that personal inquiries stemmed from the heart. They had stronger ownership and were more passionate and invested in these inquiries. This interrelated motivation to inquire was apparent in Maggie's ideal conception of teacher inquiry. She suggested that teacher inquiry could ideally combine the head and heart because this acknowledged teachers' personal and professional motivations to inquire.

When teachers are encouraged to understand their personal and professional motivations to inquire, it could help them to look beyond formal reasons to inquire. Perhaps this understanding could lessen the chances of them construing teacher inquiry as a form of compliance too.

### *Acknowledging Qualitative and Quantitative Changes*

Beginning teachers appeared to value inquiry because they found that it compelled them to confront their embedded values, beliefs or assumptions about teaching and learning. In Lisa's and Gemma's stories, they documented and reported on the qualitative and quantitative shifts that they experienced during inquiry. In their projects, they paid attention to the personal and professional value of their inquiries in addition to the impact that they made in terms of student learning.

This dual emphasis was less evident in Simon's school-based inquiry even though the qualitative shifts he experienced were a significant part of his professional learning. Since these shifts were not acknowledged in his teacher inquiry report, it alerted me to the notion that the lack of formal recognition could have led him to believe that the qualitative shifts he experienced were less important. Experienced teachers such as Maggie, Anna and Cat, attached significant personal value to their informal inquiries. The qualitative changes that they experienced in these informal inquiries gave them more personal satisfaction than their formal inquiries. They remembered these shifts because these inquiries changed their teaching philosophies and practices.

These stories suggest that a balanced approach that recognises the qualitative and quantitative changes resulting from inquiry could provide teachers with constructive opportunities to make sense of their inquiries. It would appear that teachers need to be given time and space to recognise their professional learning outcomes because these outcomes are as important as demonstrating their teaching impact on student learning. These acknowledgements could stimulate professional dialogue and relationships, and perhaps extend the purpose of teacher inquiry beyond formal expectations.

In schools with more balanced approaches to sharing teacher inquiry, they celebrated teachers' learning experiences in addition to discussing their impact on student learning. For Molly, an important part of teacher inquiry was about creating opportunities for teachers to talk about their teaching practices. In her school, teachers were scheduled to meet formally to present the inquiry process to others. She believed that these meetings gave teachers the opportunity to form purposeful professional relationships. Since these meetings were focused on inquiries, they also provided teachers with a structured way to speak about their practices. These initiatives were necessary to normalise professional conversations about teaching practices.

In Brian's story, he described some of the uncertainties that he felt during the process of inquiry in his teacher inquiry presentation. His school leaders fostered authentic depictions of inquiry and encouraged teachers to share inquiries that did not make affect or show a measurable impact on student learning. It would appear that his school leaders believed that this authentic approach to inquiry could better motivate teachers to venture beyond their routinised approaches to teaching. These authentic sharing sessions were designed purposefully to give teachers the courage and confidence to inquire into more difficult or challenging issues. Perhaps this was to encourage teachers to go beyond satisfying the formal expectations that have been associated with teacher inquiry.

Discovering new ways to acknowledge the qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of inquiry may fortify the subjective meaning teachers assign to their formal inquiries. While the central goal within teacher inquiry is to discuss the impact that teachers might have made in terms of student learning, there might need to be more consideration for the difficult qualitative shifts that teachers can experience through inquiry. Creating space for teachers to acknowledge and discuss these shifts could provide teachers with more professional learning satisfaction and make inquiry a more profound learning experience. When teachers construe inquiry to be a substantive form of teacher learning, they might be more inclined to explore difficult areas of student learning.

### *Teacher Identities and Change*

Teachers spoke about using inquiry to learn and change in all eleven stories. For some teachers, the qualitative and internal changes were the most memorable parts of their inquiries, while others were more enthused about the practical changes that they made to their practices. The teachers who focused on the practical changes tended to describe teacher inquiry as an incentive to seek new or different teaching strategies. I noticed that these

practical stories lacked the evocative impressions that I felt from the qualitative changes other teachers mentioned.

According to the Ministry of Education (2008), teacher learning “must be enacted in practice and directed towards improvement” (p. 149). This belief justifies the need to demonstrate that teacher inquiry and learning can make a measurable impact on student learning. However, it is pertinent to consider how teachers play dual roles in professional learning. Teachers are essentially learners and teachers when they learn professionally. When teachers could acknowledge the qualitative changes and professional learning in their inquiries, they seemed to be able to foreground their positions as learners in their stories. This positioning changed when they described themselves as teachers before learners. I have not explored these varied positions in my work thoroughly but I can see the potential of examining these differing positions to gain deeper insight into the identities that teachers adopt when they make sense of their professional learning.

### *Learning about Learning*

I found Laurie and Maggie’s views of learning interesting because they may have envisaged learning as a “complex biological-and-experiential” process that occurs when people learn (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 13). This way of portraying learning goes beyond the idea that “experience causes learning to happen” because it highlights that internal “physical and behavioural” conditions are also necessary for learning to occur (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 13). This view of learning makes it possible to argue that people learn when they are ready to experience learning.

One of the continuing challenges in education is to find ways to determine this readiness to learn. This view of learning points out that there is still much to learn about the learning process. When this view is applied to teacher learning initiatives such as teacher inquiry, it

challenges the notion that teaching can cause learning. If teaching cannot cause learning, then strategically-designed teacher learning efforts such as teacher inquiry may have a limited impact on student learning.

I bring forth this view of learning to highlight that there is still much to explore, understand and debate about the learning process and experience. I believe that teacher inquiry provides teachers with increased opportunities for professional learning but I am cautious of placing an expectation on teachers to apply their learning and have this result in measurable student learning gains. There is still too much that is unknown about the learning process and how teachers apply their learning in practice. It is possible that teachers may need longer periods of inquiry to learn, change and apply new teaching habits. These unknown factors might make it difficult to provide evidence that teacher inquiry can make an impact on student learning.

For teachers such as Laurie who described herself as a facilitator of learning, teacher inquiry was a teaching mindset. She believed that an inquiry-driven approach to teaching and learning could provide her students with open-ended, rich and deep learning opportunities. Since she regarded learning as an internal structural change, she was uncertain if the marked improvements in learning that her students showed had occurred because of her teaching. Her doubts made me more aware that teachers may not have been encouraged or given opportunities to engage in critical dialogue and debate about student learning in their inquiries. Encouraging this kind of dialogue could foster teachers' intellectual curiosity (Dewey, 1910, p. 219), and perhaps, stimulate more critical conversations about reality (Freire, 1998, p. 77). These rich and challenging dialogues could provoke deeper inquiries into practice and perhaps, move teachers towards collaborative understandings of learning and teaching.

### *Teachers as Learners*

In my exploration of Te Kotahitanga, I learnt the value of adopting an appreciative mindset towards teacher learning. I believe that there are useful teacher learning lessons that can be gained from the *kaupapa* and epistemologies that undergirded Te Kotahitanga. The Māori underpinning that guided the professional learning process in this programme provided teachers with a safe, supportive and constructive climate to learn professionally. This approach was evident in the way that Bishop et al. (2012) described teacher learning metaphorically as an offering, gift or “koha” (p. 696).

When learning is described as a gift that is offered to teachers, it acknowledges teachers’ capacities to accept or reject these gifts. Teachers in this programme were exposed to “alternative discourses” that presented them with different ways of promoting learning for Māori students (Bishop et al., 2012, p. 696). With a *koha* mindset towards teacher learning, facilitators provided teachers with time and support to consider how these discourses could enhance their practice. Teachers were encouraged to challenge their existing practices, values and beliefs towards Māori students in a teacher-centric way. This teacher-centric approach recognised and regarded teachers as learners, and created conducive learning opportunities for teachers to challenge their entrenched ways. At the core of an appreciative approach to teacher inquiry is the motivation to honour and respect teachers within the inquiry and learning process. I see value in developing different ways to acknowledge teachers as learners within the inquiry process.

Another way to gain more awareness of teachers’ learning experience could be through examining the emotional aspects of professional learning. I touched upon this in Brian’s story because it allowed me to concentrate on his thoughts and feelings about teacher inquiry from an alternative perspective. This perspective could be used to shed more light on the processes

that teachers go through to make sense of themselves and their practices. I also saw potential links between emotional expressions and identities in Mary's story. I discussed these moments in her story because they allowed me to imagine the sense-making process that teachers go through emotionally. This process could influence the way that teachers position themselves in their stories. I think that applying an emotional lens on teacher stories could provide a deeper unravelling of their experiences.

These glimpses of teacher emotions suggest that there is an inherent vulnerability within the professional learning process that calls for more investigation. This could bring more clarity to the ways that teachers cope with the uncertainties of teaching, and teacher and student learning. Finding ways to heighten the subjective meanings that teachers attach to and derive from their learning could increase the relevance and significance of professional learning initiatives for teachers. For this to happen in teacher inquiry, teachers must first be more prominently acknowledged as learners in the inquiry process. This acknowledgement would allow teachers to discuss the personal and professional values of inquiring into their practice.

In my exploration of Tammy's experiences, I conjectured that a Samoan-sense of professional responsibility could have influenced her conceptualisation of teacher inquiry. This exploration accentuated the links between culture, teaching identities and practices, and highlighted her personal motivations to inquire. These links exposed the entangled motivations that might have contributed to her uptake of teacher inquiry. It also illuminated another way to understand how teachers conceptualise the purpose of teacher inquiry.

It was unclear how she shared or presented her inquiry to others but what was apparent was the lack of opportunity to discuss or acknowledge the cultural underpinnings that were embedded in her practice and motivation to inquire. This links back to my earlier suggestion about acknowledging the qualitative and quantitative shifts that teachers experience during

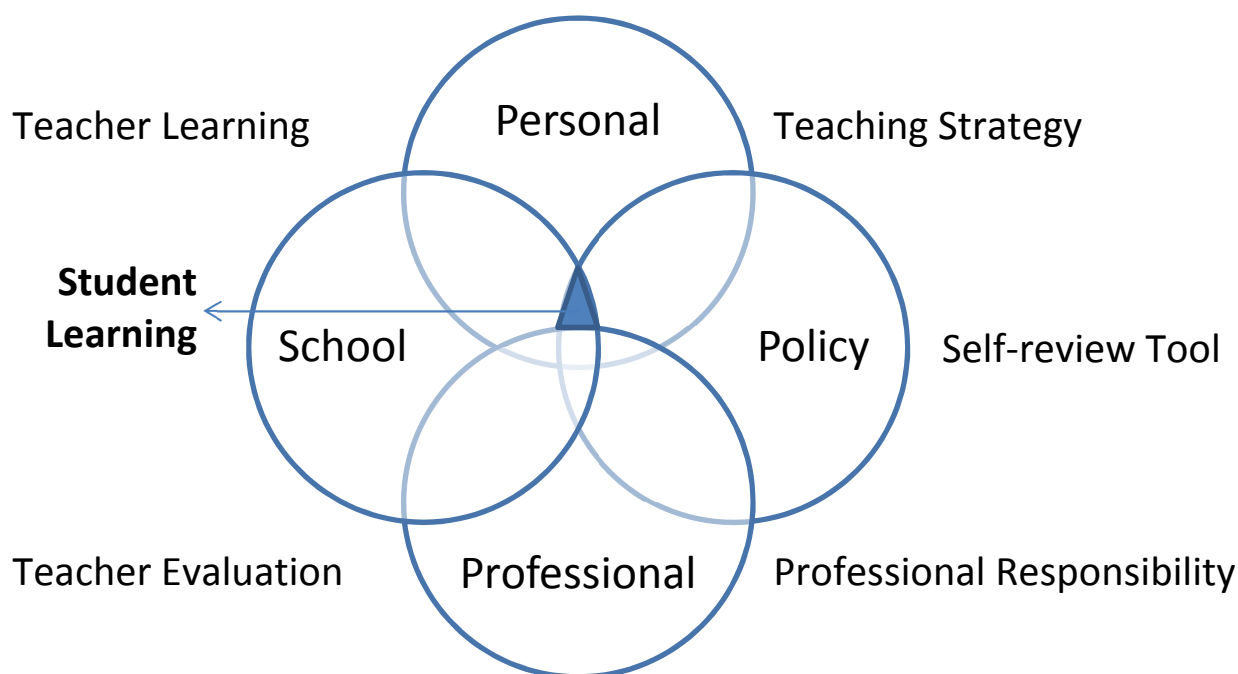


inquiry. Finding ways to acknowledge both shifts could encourage teachers to understand the varied motivations that can underpin teacher inquiry.

In the push to demonstrate that teacher inquiry can make a difference to student learning, it is imperative to remember that teachers are learners in the process of inquiry. When teacher learning outcomes are valued and acknowledged, it could elevate the significance and meaning that teachers associate with inquiry.

### *Multiple Motivations*

In Figure 4 below, I illustrated the multiple motivations that I gathered from the teachers' storied views of teacher inquiry. This illustration captures the complex convergence of agendas that shape teacher inquiry. At the very core of the illustration rests the underlying goal of teacher inquiry, to improve student learning. This goal represents a shared understanding that students are the main motivation for formal and informal teacher inquiries.



*Figure 4. Multiple motivations influencing teacher inquiry*

A visual representation of the flexible implementation of teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning, teaching strategy, self-review tool, teacher evaluation and professional responsibility, makes it evident how multiple personal and professional purposes to inquire have been associated with teacher inquiry. This intermingling of formal and informal motivations could make the teacher learning aspect of teacher inquiry less obvious to teachers because formal obligations carry a sense of accountability. Such a slant towards accountability may have given rise to teacher-inquiry compliance rather than professional development or learning.

In school-based inquiries, the notion of compliance was palpable. Some teachers overtly referred to teacher inquiry as a form of compliance while others hinted at compliance differently. For example, most teachers were familiar with the term “teacher inquiry” and unfamiliar with the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle even though the latter was designed to promote teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning. Since the “teaching as inquiry” cycle, as previously argued, places an emphasis on teaching impact rather than teacher learning, this could cause teachers to conduct inquiries to be compliant rather than to grow professionally. Since the “teaching as inquiry” cycle is published in the New Zealand Curriculum and through teacher inquiry reports published by the Education Review Office (2012c), there appears to be more opportunity to formulate an association between teacher inquiry and teaching impact rather than professional development and learning.

As argued, these inquiry cycles promote different types of teacher inquiry. Teachers will experience a more collective approach to teaching and inquiry, and a stronger emphasis on teacher learning when they are guided by the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle. In comparison, the “teaching as inquiry” cycle appears to depict a more individualised approach to inquiry, and less emphasis on the teacher learning aspects of inquiry. The popularity of the “teaching as inquiry” cycle may indicate a stronger preference for an

individualised approach to teacher inquiry and it might signal a wider acceptance of teaching as an individual, rather than a collective act.

I think that there needs to be a more sophisticated understanding of the potential benefits, limitations and challenges of individualised and collective approaches to inquiry. This understanding can help school leaders, teacher leaders and teacher-learning facilitators to consider the implications and differences between the two approaches.

### *Supportive Climates*

When teacher inquiry is construed as a means to provide teachers with more opportunities to learn from their practice, it creates space to envision teacher learning as a professional, but personal learning process. In order to realise this, teachers will require adequate time and support. According to Timperley et al. (2007), teacher inquiry is dependent on teachers positioning themselves as “agents of change – for their students and their own learning” (p. xliv). For teacher inquiry to be meaningful, teachers need to have adequate learning autonomy that provides them with “self-regulated learning” opportunities (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 225). This conception of teacher inquiry emphasises the self within professional learning because professional learning can help teachers to develop their self-awareness, critical and reflective skills. These skills enable teachers to scrutinise the philosophies, values and beliefs that inform their teaching identities and practices.

When teachers inquire into their practice, they examine aspects of themselves that can cause deep conflicts. These conflicts arise when teachers are compelled to address new knowledge or skills that may not be compatible with their existing stance (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 8). Several teachers described how they may have experienced this situation in their inquiries. In Anna and Cat’s story, Cat credited Anna for supporting and guiding her through difficult intellectual and emotional changes that changed her practice. Brian believed that his peer

coach provided him with the intellectual support that he needed to extend his teaching practice, while Simon believed that his colleagues provided him with a safe, reflective space to grow. These stories exemplified the importance and potential benefits of establishing strong professional relationships.

While Anna and Cat had an established professional relationship with each other, Simon and Brian experienced new professional relationships that were fostered during inquiry. In Molly's school, she believed that teacher inquiry could be structured to provide teachers with more opportunities to form professional relationships with each other. These stories hint at the collaborative culture that is being cultivated in schools through inquiry. While an increase in collaboration is advantageous, the professional collaboration that these teachers have experienced lean more towards sharing details of practices rather than a joint approach to teaching (Little, 1990, p. 521). It might be useful to explore how a joint approach to teaching could transform teacher inquiry because this approach would move teachers towards a more collective understanding and vision of teaching.

### *Inquiry as a Collective Responsibility*

In previous sections, I have discussed how various models and cycles that promote teacher inquiry, vary in focus. These variations may have caused the different inquiry experiences shared by the teachers in this study. Since these varied approaches promote different types of teacher inquiry, I think school leaders, teacher leaders, and teacher-learning facilitators, may benefit from a comparative illustration or table that delineates the differences between them. It is pertinent to be aware of these differences because they affect how teachers conceptualise teacher inquiry. For example, the "teaching as inquiry" cycle and model depict the inquiry process as an individual responsibility. This could limit the impact of their inquiries to individual classrooms. Even if these individualised inquiries were supported by others in their

professional learning communities, these inquiries might not examine the collective impact of teaching.

Envisioning teacher inquiry as a collective responsibility may be a significant departure from the individualised approach to teacher inquiry. When teachers inquire into the collective impact of teaching, there is greater potential for their inquiries to make an impact on priority students. This potential is mentioned in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle when the authors stated that inquiry requires a “collective rather than individual analysis” of teaching practices (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xliv). Adopting a collective mindset towards inquiry encourages teachers to examine the overall rather than an isolated impact of teaching on student learning. This mindset resembles the kind of “*collective responsibility*” for student learning that underpins effective professional learning communities (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 226). Developing a collective mindset could stimulate collaborative thinking and shared conceptions of teaching and learning.

Professional relationships are a crucial element in collaborative inquiries. When teachers have open, honest and critical collegial relations, it can enhance their collaborative experiences and add more value and depth to their inquiries. Within effective professional learning communities, student and teacher learning inquiries are shared professional initiatives (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 227). This supportive climate can deepen the inquiries that teachers conduct on themselves and their teaching practices.

In their vision of teacher inquiry, Timperley et al. (2007) advocated for critical examination of teachers’ entrenched beliefs and values about teaching and learning (p. 203). When teachers adopt a critical approach to inquiry, they might confront aspects of themselves or their practice that may not be conducive to student learning. Since critical inquiries could be challenging, a collaborative approach to inquiry could provide teachers with the support that

they need to manage potential tensions. The community learning approach can provide teachers with the emotional, intellectual and social support that they need to persist with difficult inquiries.

When teacher inquiry is construed as a collective responsibility, teachers are able to share the tensions, puzzles and conflicts that they experience because members within the community will have a vested interest and understanding of their challenges. A collective approach to inquiry can potentially broaden the scope of teacher inquiry. This broadened focus could provide school leaders and teachers with a more holistic and realistic understanding of the potential impact that teaching can make upon student learning.

### *Envisioning a Partnership of Inquiry and Learning*

I believe that a partnership of inquiry and learning can promote teaching as a collective responsibility. The notion of collective responsibility was mentioned in the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle as a reflective focus during inquiry. Timperley et al. (2007) also emphasised that teachers required the support of “inter-related and parallel levels” of inquiry (p. xlii). I interpreted this as a call for a more holistic approach to inquiry. In my holistic vision of inquiry, teacher inquiry becomes part of a larger partnership of inquiry and learning between students, teachers and school leaders.

A partnership of inquiry and learning can create a culture of inquiry that generates opportunities for students, teachers and school leaders to learn from each other. This partnership brings school leaders, teachers and students together to discuss, negotiate and determine the central purpose and focus of learning and inquiry. Involving students in the inquiry process provides teachers with a deeper insight into the challenges that students confront in their learning. These insights ground teacher inquiries in realistic student needs

and in return provide teachers with opportunities to learn from their students. This *ako* approach engages teachers and students as learners in the process of inquiry.

The insight gained through student and teacher inquiries would feed into school-level inquiries conducted by school leaders. School leaders can use these insights to understand, plan and implement ways that support student and teacher learning. This integrated approach relies on open, honest and ongoing communication between students, teachers and school leaders. It fosters respect, trust, strong relationships and a community of learning at multiple levels. This structure of inquiry involves students, teachers and school leaders in designing, conducting and reflecting on the process of learning and teaching. When school leaders adopt this holistic approach to inquiry, they inquire into their responsibilities as pedagogical leaders and play a large role in forming and facilitating partnerships of learning.

The ways in which school leaders can support teaching and learning were mentioned in the School Leadership and Student Outcomes Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) and in an updated version of the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle (Timperley, 2008). I make mention of leadership inquiries because school leaders play a vital role in partnerships of inquiry and learning. Since school leaders are pedagogical leaders who determine the type and structure of inquiries that teachers conduct, they need to have a clear vision and purpose for inquiry.

I discussed this holistic approach to inquiry because I believe that partnerships of inquiry and learning that can cultivate symbiotic teaching and learning relationships. Such a partnership might encourage teachers and school leaders to participate in school-wide inquiries that may increase learning opportunities for students. At the heart of this partnership lies the notion that education can be a shared responsibility between teachers, school leaders, parents and the wider community. Bringing together multiple stakeholders in a partnership of learning can

transform how inquiry is conceived. There needs to be further thinking to realise the potential that this approach holds. I think that this approach to inquiry will be of relevance to educational stakeholders who subscribe to a collective vision of education.

### *Promoting Criticality*

In the conceptualisations of teacher inquiry discussed in this thesis, teacher inquiry is often framed as a means to further teaching practices, teacher thinking and awareness. This places teachers' focus on the improvement of their practices or the technical and practical aspects of teaching. While these are worthwhile focuses, I believe that the purpose for teacher inquiry can be extended beyond these aspects of teaching because teachers may be interested in the larger implications of teaching and learning. This notion is implied within existing cycles and models because teachers are encouraged to venture beyond their existing knowledge base to seek the expertise of their peers and to explore educational research.

Developing teachers' critical thinking and reflective skills through teacher inquiry could influence how teachers view themselves. It might allow them to entertain the idea that they could be active participants rather than implementers or consumers of educational change. When teachers adopt a participatory mindset towards educational change, they will want to deepen their understanding of educational issues or contextual challenges that affect their practices. This helps them to become more cognisant of the forces and agendas that underpin educational policies and research.

When teachers develop this kind of critical awareness, they could become more empowered to "defend themselves against unreasonable claims" (Thrupp, 2012, p. 309). Teachers might want to use their critical skills to develop a deeper understanding of themselves, their practices and the impact of their actions. This could give them the confidence and ability to "raise their heads" towards unreasoned criticisms (Thrupp, 2012, p. 309). Developing a



critical awareness of educational issues and policies helps teachers to understand how they are located within the politics of blame in education (Thrupp, 2009, p. 6). This kind of critical awareness sensitises teachers to the dominant agendas that shape their education system.

When teachers are engaged in teaching that contributes towards educational change, they may be more predisposed to question rather than accept the status quo. They gravitate towards critical and reflective skills that enlighten them to the social implications of teaching. These skills expose them to the notion that teaching is a social and political practice. They also influence teachers to imagine how they can use inquiry to create opportunities to produce, engage and disseminate educational knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). When teachers construe teaching as a social and political responsibility, they may be more likely to play agentic roles in realising educational and social change. They might seek alternative ways to engage in educational practices that promote social transformation or more egalitarian visions of education.

### *Summing Up*

The themes, thoughts and suggestions that I discussed in this thesis captured some of the complexities within teacher inquiry. Teachers' lived encounters with inquiry enabled me to accentuate these complexities from their perspectives. These stories, deconstructions and themes are by no means an exhaustive list of how teacher inquiry can be conceptualised. It is important to continue deciphering, questioning and challenging the way that teacher inquiry is conceptualised because teacher learning is located in a complex space.

I discussed these impressions with the hope that they may inspire school leaders, teacher-learning facilitators and policy makers to find innovative ways to create deep learning opportunities through teacher inquiry. Finding ways to give teachers more support, ownership and autonomy over the inquiry process are school-level changes that can change how teacher

inquiry is implemented and experienced. I also theorised how a partnership of inquiry and learning at the school level can further benefit student and teacher learning but this idea needs further investigation.

I believe that policy makers may want to consider the repercussions of associating teacher inquiry with multiple purposes. For example, the increased emphasis on literacy and numeracy standards established through the National Standards policy may make it difficult for lower-decile school leaders to encourage their teachers to inquire beyond literacy and numeracy needs. Since these schools will be more likely to intensify their emphasis on priority students, literacy and numeracy, it reduces the likelihood that teachers in lower-decile schools will experience high levels of autonomy over their inquiries. While these focuses are undeniable urgent, implementing rigid forms of inquiry may be demotivating for teachers because it limits their ability to be responsive to their professional learning needs and more importantly, the needs of their students.

When teacher inquiry is used as a tool to improve student learning, it makes the rationale for teacher learning and change clear. However, teachers may require stronger motivations to adopt inquiry as a professional way of being. I highlighted some of these motivations when I examined teachers' experiences through deconstructive lenses. The contextual, philosophical and practical issues surrounding their experiences allowed me to conjecture about the transformational potential within teacher inquiry.

It is imperative that teacher inquiry does not lose its anchor as a meaningful form of teacher learning because this may make teachers more susceptible to construe teacher inquiry as a form of compliance. Being explicit about the professional learning benefits of inquiry could encourage teachers to conceptualise inquiry as a meaningful, realistic and sustainable form of professional learning. There must also be increased opportunities to position, respect and

value teachers as learners in the inquiry process. These notions acknowledge the uncertainty of teacher learning and the importance of supporting teachers in their inquiries.

When I shaped these impressions into practical and actionable suggestions, I thought about how policy makers, researchers, teacher-learning facilitators, school leaders and teacher leaders could make teacher inquiry a more significant form of professional learning for teachers. Even though these suggestions are designed to provide teachers with more opportunities to become engaged as active participants in educational change, it is not my intention to prescribe these suggestions rigidly. One of the biggest lessons that I have learnt from this research experience is that change “must be forged *with*, not *for*,” teachers (Freire, 1972, p. 25, emphasis in original). Teachers should be consulted to give these suggestions their transformational meaning and impact because these suggestions affect teachers’ and students’ lives.

In my study, I have shown that teachers are an indispensable part of the teacher inquiry puzzle. Since teachers are the ones who will experience the effects of these changes, they should be involved in the shaping of educational policies. Consulting teachers in the process of change is important because teachers are the ones enacting change. My work serves as a reminder that teacher voice should be given attention and consideration in educational policies.

It is also my hope that this body of work may move schools closer towards developing a partnership of inquiry and learning. This collaborative approach might result in a co-conceptualisation of teacher inquiry, which may increase the value and significance of teacher inquiry as a form of teacher learning.

## **Closing One Door and Opening Others**

In this thesis, I used storied insights and deconstructive explorations to create a composite understanding of teacher inquiry. This composite understanding brought together personal and professional meanings, motivations, and expectations. Since these insights were fluidly constructed, interpreted and presented, they do not pose definitive understandings of teacher inquiry. In this interpretive study, I concentrated on exploration. This mindset allowed me to uncover the multifaceted challenge of conceptualising teacher inquiry. I hope that the ideas and issues identified within this thesis will stimulate further thinking, questioning and reflection on teacher inquiry.

### *The Spirit of Exploration*

I strived to maintain an open mind and spirit throughout my study with the hope that this could result in a pluralistic view of teacher inquiry. I believe that I have achieved this goal in my montage of teacher inquiry. I wanted my work to highlight “multiple ways of knowing the world” and to challenge singular or unitary conceptions of teacher inquiry (Pinnegar & Daynes 2007, p. 33). My desire for a humanistic and authentic approach to research led me to make methodological decisions that resulted in a narrative study that exposed experiential and deconstructive views of teacher inquiry.

In this study, I learnt to trust in the richness of a qualitative “research paradigm” even though I consistently struggled to become a “flexible instrument” (Ely, 1991, p. 32). In these struggles, I confronted my positivist tendencies, and ingrained assumptions about teaching and learning. I used this trust, reflexivity and flexibility to navigate through the ambiguity of knowing through stories. My methodological goal was to generate idiosyncratic insights into teacher inquiry that could push “reductionistic and formalistic boundaries” (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000, p. 41). In order for this to occur, I had to continuously question, explore and reframe what it meant for teachers to inquire and learn from their practice.

I likened parts of my research process to an explorative dance. In this dance, I took teacher conceptions of teacher inquiry and extended them into different realms to further my understanding. I also danced to resist rigid, quantifiable or reductionistic views of reality. I ventured beyond teacher stories to locate their voices in philosophical spaces that allowed me to envision teacher inquiry differently. This gave me room to conjecture about teacher inquiry in terms of possibilities. These deconstructive explorations were “relativistic and pluralistic” views of teacher inquiry that accentuated the subjective and particular meanings that teachers associated to their inquiries (Eisner, 1992, p. 14). I used these theorisations to construct alternative associations and pathways to teacher inquiry.

### *Continuing the Story*

Writing this thesis represents an act of closing. As I close this door, I see that the pathway before me has lit up with new doors and new ways to experience reality. When one door closes, others open to show new possibilities.

In my methodological story, I captured intricate thoughts, details and decisions that I made during the study. I storied this process to present and locate knowing in a narrated and constructed space. Like Conle (2001), I believe that stories are constructed as “truth claims” of lived realities and as such, they represent rational forms of knowledge (p. 28). In this thesis, I used these truths to illustrate various ways of conceptualising teacher inquiry.

During my research, I became a storyteller and meaning-maker. I storied my research process to locate myself in my quest to understand teacher inquiry, teachers’ professional lives and teacher learning, realistically and purposefully. This reflective and reflexive thought-process challenged and changed my perception of reality. These changes brought me closer to

construing reality as a construct that people can debate, represent and develop into a lengthy and perhaps never-ending discourse.

This thesis represents a small portion of the questions, dilemmas and puzzles that I have considered about teacher inquiry. As I write these final pages in my thesis, I also think of the numerous ways that I could have inquired into teacher inquiry. For example, an extended and more collaborative form of narrative inquiry might have yielded different insights into teacher inquiry. I could return to my stories with an emotional lens or pay closer attention to the identity work that teachers spoke about in their inquiries. These ideas indicate that there are many ways to construct and deconstruct the teacher inquiry puzzle.

My work has taught me big life lessons. I now see the value of exploring different ways of knowing, capturing and discussing reality. I learnt to recognise the strengths and limitations of my mind, methodologies and methods, which Eisner (1988) aptly described as the mental constraints that we place upon ourselves (p. 19). I attempted to be cognisant of these limitations by actively acknowledging the thoughts that were guiding my decisions and actions. I believe that this attitude prompted me to search for alternative ways to make the experiential aspects of teacher inquiry more visible. It is my hope that the knowledge that I have put forth can provoke divergent ideas and discussion about research, methodology, teacher inquiry and teacher learning.

Since we investigate “our sentient and intelligent selves and a world we cannot know in its pristine state” (Eisner, 1992, p. 14), the questions and answers that I have explored contribute towards a continuing body of partial and situational knowing that we create through research. In my search for knowing, I have come to believe that life is a process of becoming (Freire, 1972, p. 57). This belief allows me to dream of unimagined futures and to adopt an agentic stance. It reminds me that we study aspects of living that are captured “in the middle”

because these illuminations will always have antecedents and descendants (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). These illuminations can only offer shades of meaning in a continuous quest to better understand the realities we construct.

I liken the insights that I have discussed in this thesis to a series of experiential images of teacher inquiry. These images captured glimpses of experience that teachers may encounter through teacher inquiry. There is value in studying these images because they can inform efforts to strengthen the teacher inquiry process for teachers. These images also allowed me to study the intricacies of teacher learning. These partial and temporal glimpses accentuated the realities that teachers constructed to make meaning of their experiences.

I extend an invitation to others to find innovative ways to use and interpret these glimpses. Imagine placing these glimpses into a kaleidoscope and turning the kaleidoscope to create new patterns of understanding. All that is required is an open mind and an adventurous spirit!

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A      Interview Guide

Appendix B      Ethics Plan

Appendix C      Recruitment Plan

Appendix D      Recruitment Flowchart

Appendix E      Communication Plan

Appendix F      Early Interpretive Forms

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

The unstructured interview process is guided by the basic phases of narrative interviews outlined by Bauer and Gaskell (2000, p. 62).

Phases	Description	Rules
0	Preparation	Exploring the field Formulating exmanent questions (what the interviewer is interested in)
1	Initiation	Formulating initial topic for narration
2	Main narration	No interruptions Only non-verbal encouragement to continue story-telling Wait for coda
3	Questioning phase	Only “what happened then?” No opinion and attitude questions No arguing on contradictions No why-questions Exmanent into immanent questions (in participants’ language/vocabulary/reference)
4	Concluding talk	Stop recording Why-questions allowed Memory protocol immediately after interview

### First Interview Guide

**Concentrate on building rapport before the interview** = *Small talk before the interview (the weather) = 5 minutes*

Thank you for meeting me and for participating in my research.

I realise you are busy and value your time. I would just like to spend a couple of minutes just to get to know you before we start the formal interviewing.

- How has your day shaped out so far?

- How are you feeling today?

Let’s begin with the consent form for participants. Do you have any concerns about signing this form before we start the interview process?

**Make sure participant signs the consent form before progressing further.**

Thank you for signing the consent form. **Would you like to be referred to by your real name or pseudonym during the interview process?**

I would like to briefly talk about the whole interview process; which begins with a short description of the unstructured interviewing style followed a brief summary of the purpose of my research. Then I will start recording our conversation and at the end I will turn off the recorder and go through a little bit of a debriefing after the interview. **Please feel free to stop**

**me at any time if you have any questions or feel free to pause or take a break at any time during the interview.**

As I mentioned in my email, I will be focusing on you: your story, feelings and thoughts and experiences with teacher inquiry as a form of professional learning and development. There are no correct or incorrect responses to the questions that I may ask.

To get the most of this experience, you will be doing most of the talking. This gives you the control to think/reflect about your experience and describe how things worked out for you and what they mean to you. As I mentioned in my email, this interview is really an invitation to share your experiences however you feel most comfortable.

My role as an interviewer is to support you throughout the process. There might be times where I would connect to your story by sharing a story of my own but the main focus is on you sharing your experience of teacher inquiry.

As agreed, your responses will be associated with a pseudonym for your confidentiality. I will be recording the interview because I don't want to miss out on any part of your story and I might be taking some notes. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential and your recorded responses will be deleted after five years. I will transcribe the interview and I will email you the transcription to review for accuracy and clarity in the content you shared.

I anticipate this interview to be between 30, 60 to 90 minutes long because this sharing experience is highly dependent on what you would like to explore and share.

**Do you have any questions about the interviewing process so far?**

Next, I would like to briefly **share the purpose of my project** and the terms I use.

I am interested in listening to teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry as part of their professional learning and development.

Your stories will contribute towards an understanding of how teachers perceive TI as part of their PLD. You may benefit from this experience through talking, exploring and reflecting on your experiences.

Researchers, policy makers or school leadership could use the insight gained towards enhancing the PLD experiences for teachers by deepening their understanding of teachers' PLD needs and how teacher experience TI at schools.

I use the Education Review Office (ERO) definition of PLD to include "all the formal and informal processes used to improve the knowledge and practice of teachers" (Education Review Office, 2009a, p. 1). Teacher inquiry is a form of PLD that orients and measures PLD effects through student outcomes. The ERO define TI as "a process that involves educators investigating the impact of their decisions and practice on students" (Education Review Office, 2012b, p. 1).

**Don't share if not necessary.**

**The difference between teacher and learning inquiry and professional learning inquiry**

The ERO has differentiated between the Ministry of Education's teaching and learning inquiry and professional learning inquiry by stating that the teaching and learning inquiry is to "bring about improved outcomes for students through a cyclical process ...

1. Focusing inquiry – what should students achieve?
2. Teaching inquiry – which strategies will support students to achieve these outcomes?
3. Learning inquiry – What learning happened as a result of strategies and what will teachers do to ensure students continue to progress?"(Education Review Office, 2012b, p. 6)

In comparison, "professional learning inquiry intentionally focuses teachers on the learning that will bring about improved outcomes for students" (Education Review Office, 2012b, p. 7).

In short, teaching and learning inquiry is student outcomes focused whereas professional learning is focused on how teacher learning can be used to affect student learning by targeting strategic areas for professional learning in order to meet diverse student needs.

**Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?**

**Begin recording the interview.**

As I turn on these recording devices, I want you to know that I might check on them from time to time to check if they are still recording our conversation.

**Phase 1 Initiation** – Exploring the exmanent question

**Description of teacher inquiry experience**

*"How have primary school teachers in New Zealand experienced teacher inquiry as a form of professional learning and development?"*

*Let's begin by you thinking about your experiences with teacher inquiry as part of your professional learning and development. You can share your story in any way you feel comfortable perhaps beginning with how you started experiencing this way of professional learning and development.*

**Focus on the invitation into their world – No judgements only wonderings about where they are taking me and what things means to them in their world. Seek clarification of stories and observations through wondering. Ask them what they mean rather than assigning my meaning.**

**Phase 2 Main Narration** – No interruptions, Non-verbal encouragement & Wait for coda

**Phase 3 Questioning Phase** – Additional guiding questions

**How do you feel about this interview so far?**

**Are you okay with how this interviewing is progressing?**

- Can we explore more examples of your experience with teacher inquiry?
- How do you feel about your experience with teacher inquiry?

#### Guiding probes

- Please describe ... further
- Please share more examples of what happened
- Please tell me more about ...
- What was it like to ...?
- What happened then/next?

Thank you very much for your sharing your insight and stories.

#### **Do you have anything else you would like to add, elaborate or explore before we finish the interview?**

In the next few weeks, I will email you the transcription from this interview to review for accuracy and clarity in the content you shared today. After that, we can discuss details of the second interview.

The main purpose of the second interview is for clarification, elaboration and exploration of the information shared from the first interview. It allows me to ask follow-up questions that I may have after reviewing the transcript from our first interview, or for you to share any reflections, other ideas or experiences you recollected after the first interview.

#### **Phase 4 Concluding Talk – Post-interview small talk**

The purpose of this post-interview conversation is to conclude our conversation/interview in a pleasant and positive manner. I hope that you have enjoyed sharing your experiences and I would like you to know that I value your time and stories.

**-How did that interview feel to you?**

**-How do you feel about the interview experience?**

Thank you again for taking the time to share your experiences with me today. I will be in touch via email in the next few weeks.

#### Researcher's Reflection Notes *(to be completed immediately after the interview)*

-What was learnt? Summarize what was learnt from the interview

-Overall Impression = emotional tone, engagement, body language (interview length)

-Post-interview small talk

### Post-interview: Thank you email within 24-hours after interview

Dear XX,

Thank you very much for your time today. I thoroughly enjoyed our interview/chat and hope that it was a good reflective experience for you too.

In the next few weeks, I will be working on transcribing our interview. I will be in touch with the transcription in the near future.

As mentioned previously, if you know of any other primary school teachers who would be interested in my project, please feel free to provide them with either the information letter or my email [joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz). I am attaching the letter to this email just in case.

Thanks once again for your time.

Joanna

---

### Second interview email & appointment (Share Transcription)

Dear XX,

As promised, I am attaching a transcription of our first interview session. If possible, please review it for accuracy and clarity in the content you shared with me. Please let me know if there are any discrepancies or problems.

We can address them before our second interview via email or we can address them when we meet face to face.

If you are willing to participate in a second interview on teacher inquiry being a part of your professional learning and development, please provide as much information as you can below.

#### *Second Interview: Appointment Details*

1. Interview Location (e.g. at your school/classroom, university campus or a public location):
2. Time:
3. Date:
4. From our first interview, you requested reminders via email/text 24-hours before it is scheduled. Would you like to be reminded the same way this time?

Thanks once again for your time. I will be in touch soon.

Joanna



## **Second Interview Options**

Depending on the stories gathered from the first interview, the researcher may choose between the two second interview guides outlined below.

1. Option 1 = continues the interview as an unstructured format
2. Option 2 = changes the interview into a semi-structured format

### *Option 1: Unstructured Second Interview Guide*

#### **Phase 0 Preparations - Greeting & Reviewing Details**

Thank you again for sharing your time with me. I would like to begin by reiterating that there are no correct or incorrect responses to the questions that I ask. I just wish to focus on your experience with teacher inquiry from your perspective.

Please remember that I will be recording the interview and I might be taking some notes. Your responses will be kept confidential and your recorded responses will be deleted after two years.

I anticipate this interview to be between 60 to 90 minutes long. After transcribing the interview, I will email you the transcription to review for accuracy and clarity in the content you shared.

After your review, we may discuss the need to schedule a follow-up interview.

#### **Phase 0 Preparations - Purpose**

The main purpose of the second interview is for clarification, elaboration and exploration of the information shared from the first interview. It allows me to ask follow-up questions that I may have after reviewing the transcript from our first interview, or for you to share any reflections, other ideas or experiences you recollected after the first interview.

#### **Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?**

#### **Phase 1 Initiation – Clarification of the First Interview**

I would like to begin by clarifying a couple of items you mentioned previously.

*Questions will encourage further reflection, clarification, elaboration and exploration of details/events mentioned during the first interview.*

#### **Phase 2 Main Narration – No interruptions, Non-verbal encouragement & Wait for coda**

#### **Phase 3 Questioning Phase – Additional guiding questions**

#### **Optional Prompt**

The following item is an *aide memoire or agenda* to stimulate more stories of PLD experience. If the prompt is used, it returns the interview to Phase 1 Initiation to begin exploring the exmanent question.

### **Phase 1 Initiation** – Exploring the exmanent question

#### Comparison of teacher inquiry to previous PLD experiences

Research Q2: How do teachers compare their teacher inquiry experiences to previous professional learning and development experiences?

*I would like to hear about your other professional learning and development experiences. Think back to your first professional learning and development experience and how it compares to your teacher inquiry experiences.*

### **Phase 2 Main Narration** – No interruptions, Non-verbal encouragement & Wait for coda

### **Phase 3 Questioning Phase** – Additional guiding questions

- Can we explore more examples of differences in your experience with teacher inquiry?
- How do you feel about these differences in your PLD experience?

#### Guiding probes

- Please describe ... further
- Please share more examples of what happened
- Please tell me more about ...
- What was it like to ...?
- What happened then/next?

Thank you very much for your stories.

**Do you have anything else you would like to add, elaborate or explore before we finish the interview?**

In the next few weeks, I will email you the transcription from this interview to review for accuracy and clarity in the content you shared today. After reviewing, we may discuss the need for a follow-up interview.

The purpose of the follow-up interview is for further clarification, elaboration and exploration of the information shared.

Thank you again for taking the time to share your experiences with me today. I will be in touch via email in the next few weeks.

### **Phase 4 Concluding Talk** – Post-interview small talk

#### Researcher's Reflection Notes *(to be completed immediately after the interview)*

-Summarize what was learnt from the interview

-Impression = emotional tone, engagement, body language (interview length)

-Record post-interview impression & small talk

### Option 2: Semi-structured Second Interview Guide

(Please note that comments located in boxes and underlined titles are *solely* for the researcher's reference and are not shared during the interview.)

Time:

Date:

Location:

Interviewee:

#### **Phase 0 Preparations - Greeting & Reviewing Details**

Thank you again for sharing your time with me. I would like to begin by reiterating that there are no correct or incorrect responses to the questions that I ask. I just wish to focus on your experience with teacher inquiry from your perspective.

Please remember that I will be recording the interview and I might be taking some notes. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential and your recorded responses will be deleted after two years.

I anticipate this interview to be between 60 to 90 minutes long. After transcribing the interview, I will email you the transcription to review for accuracy and clarity in the content you shared.

After your review, we may discuss the need to schedule a follow-up interview.

#### Phase 0 Preparations - Purpose

The main purpose of the second interview is for clarification, elaboration and exploration of the information shared from the first interview. It allows me to ask follow-up questions that I may have after reviewing the transcript from our first interview, or for you to share any reflections, other ideas or experiences you recollected after the first interview.

**Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?**

#### Phase 1 Initiation – Clarification of the First Interview

I would like to begin by clarifying a couple of items you mentioned previously.

*Questions will encourage further reflection, clarification, elaboration and exploration of details/events mentioned during the first interview.*

**Phase 2 Main Narration** – No interruptions, Non-verbal encouragement & Wait for coda

**Phase 3 Questioning Phase** – Additional guiding questions

## Optional Prompts

The following items are an *aide memoire or agenda* to stimulate more stories of PLD experience.

If these open-ended prompts are used, they change the interview into a semi-structured format.

Research Q1: How do teachers describe their experiences with teacher inquiry?

### Description of teacher inquiry experience

- How would you share your teacher inquiry story with another teacher?
- If you had to describe teacher inquiry to another teacher, what would you say?
- How would you describe your teacher inquiry experience?
- How do you feel about your experience with teacher inquiry?

Research Q2: How do teachers compare their teacher inquiry experiences to previous professional learning and development experiences?

### Comparison of teacher inquiry to previous PLD experiences

- How do you think teacher inquiry has changed or influenced your PLD experience?
- How would you compare teacher inquiry to your previous PLD experience?
- What do you think are some of the differences between your previous PLD experiences and your teacher inquiry experience?
- How do you think teacher inquiry is different from your previous PLD experiences?

Research Q3: How do teachers perceive teacher inquiry as a form of professional learning and development?

### View of teacher inquiry as a form of PLD

- How do you view PLD? How does teacher inquiry fit into your PLD?
- How would you define teacher inquiry and how does this definition fit into your definition of PLD?
- What does teacher inquiry as a form of PLD mean to you?
- How do you perceive teacher inquiry as a form of PLD?

### Guiding probes

- Please describe ... further
- Please share more examples of what happened
- Please tell me more about ...
- What was it like to ...?
- What happened next?
- What do you think of ...?
- How did that work ... for you?
- How would you describe ...?
- How did that influence you?

Thank you very much for your stories.

**Do you have anything else you would like to add, elaborate or explore before we finish the interview?**

In the next few weeks, I will email you the transcription from this interview to review for accuracy and clarity in the content you shared today. After reviewing, we may discuss the need for a follow-up interview.

The purpose of the follow-up interview is for further clarification, elaboration and exploration of the information shared.

Thank you again for taking the time to share your experiences with me today. I will be in touch via email in the next few weeks.

**Phase 4 Concluding Talk – Post-interview small talk**

Researcher's Reflection Notes *(to be completed immediately after the interview)*

-Summarize what was learnt from the interview

-Impression = emotional tone, engagement, body language (interview length)

-Record post-interview impression & small talk

## Appendix B: Ethics Plan

### Ethical Approval



#### HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffioen  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: 2014/41/ERHEC

4 August 2014

Joanna Lim  
School of Teacher Education  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Joanna

The College of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee is pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Understanding teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry as professional learning and development" has been granted ethical approval at their meeting on 23 July 2014.

Please note that should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical clearance / approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Surtees'.

Nicola Surtees  
**Chair**  
**Educational Research Human Ethics Committee**

*"Please note that Ethical Approval and/or Clearance relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval or clearance by the Ethical Clearance Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research."*

F E S

## Information Sheet for Teachers

Email: [joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014



### Understanding Teachers' Experiences with Teacher Inquiry

#### Information Sheet for Teachers

My name is Joanna Lim and I am a PhD student in the College of Education at the University of Canterbury. Previously, I was teaching in international schools and as a curriculum coordinator became interested in professional learning and development opportunities for teachers. Specifically, I am interested in teacher inquiry as part of professional learning and development for primary school teachers. The Education Review Office (2009) defined professional learning and development as "all the formal and informal processes used to improve the knowledge and practice of teachers" (p.1). The purpose of my research project is to learn about teachers' experiences of teacher inquiry as part of their professional learning and development.

I would like to hear about your experiences and invite you to participate in my research project. If you agree to take part you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in at least two interviews. Each will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Time and location of interviews will be arranged at your convenience. The need for further interviews will be discussed and arranged if necessary.
- You will be interviewed individually and asked to speak about your experience with teacher inquiry.
- All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
- You will have the opportunity to review the transcription for accuracy and clarity.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information related to you, provided this is practically achievable.

To maintain confidentiality throughout the research process, your identity will be protected through use of a pseudonym. I will take particular care with potentially identifying information to ensure confidentiality is ensured in all data gathered for this project. Your confidentiality will be maintained in publications of the findings and any information or opinions you provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisory team. All the data will be stored securely in password protected facilities and/or locked storage at the University of Canterbury or with the researcher for the next five years. It will then be destroyed.

The results may be reported at conferences and in teachers' professional learning and development journals. The results of this research may also be used to inform policy and professional learning and development providers in a way that may improve professional learning and development initiatives for teachers. Participants will be offered a summary of the findings from the project.

If you would like to participate in this project, please feel free to email me at [joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

If you have any questions about the research project, you may email me at [joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or my supervisor Letitia Fickel at [letitia.fickel@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:letitia.fickel@canterbury.ac.nz)

If you have a complaint about the project, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

I thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.  
*Joanna Lim*

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. [www.canterbury.ac.nz](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz)  
This project has received Ethical Approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. Complaints may be addressed to: The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Phone: +64 3 345 8349

## Consent Form for Teachers

Email: [joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014



### Understanding Teachers' Experiences with Teacher Inquiry

#### Consent Form for Teachers

I have been given a full explanation of this project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.

I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in this project.

I understand that all interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage without penalty.

I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisory team. Any published or reported results will not identify me.

I understand that all data collected for this study will be stored securely in password protected facilities and/or locked storage at the University of Canterbury or with the researcher for the next five years. It will then be destroyed.

I understand that I may choose to receive a summary of findings from this project. I will provide my email address below if I choose to receive this summary.

I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Joanna Lim at [joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz).

If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. [www.canterbury.ac.nz](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz)  
This project has received Ethical Approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. Complaints may be addressed to: The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch. Phone: +64 3 345 8349



## Appendix C: Recruitment Plan

### Paper Advertisement



#### Calling all NZ Primary School Teachers

You are invited to participate in the following research project:

#### Understanding Teachers' Experiences with Teacher Inquiry

My name is Joanna Lim and I am a PhD student in the College of Education at the University of Canterbury. I am currently working on recruiting participants for my research project on teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry as part of their professional learning and development. I am particularly interested in listening to primary school teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry.

#### Your involvement

- Participate in at least two interviews. Each will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Time and location of interviews will be arranged at your convenience. The need for further interviews will be discussed and arranged if necessary.
- You will be interviewed by yourself and asked to speak about your experience with teacher inquiry.
- All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
- You will have the opportunity to review the transcription for accuracy and clarity.

The results may be reported at conferences and in teachers' professional learning and development journals. The results of this research may also be used to inform policy and professional learning and development providers in a way that may improve professional learning and development initiatives for teachers.

If you would like to discuss this further, or if you would like to participate in this project, please feel free to email me at [joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>	Teacher Inquiry Experience <a href="mailto:joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz">joanna.lim@pg.canterbury.ac.nz</a>
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### **Email 1 - Christchurch Primary School Principals**

Dear *Principal's Name*,

My name is Joanna Lim and I am a PhD student in the College of Education at the University of Canterbury.

I am currently working on recruiting participants for my research project on teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry as part of their professional learning and development.

I am particularly interested in listening to primary school teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry.

I would like to ask for your help in seeking teachers who have experienced or are experiencing teacher inquiry.

These are the two questions I have about this process.

1. Are there any special instructions or guidelines to request for invitations to be extended to your teachers?
2. Would you be willing to forward the invitation and information letter to your teachers after you have approved its content?

Please advise. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

*Joanna Lim*

### **Email 2 - NZEI - [nzei@nzei.org.nz](mailto:nzei@nzei.org.nz)**

Dear XXX,

My name is Joanna Lim and I am a PhD student in the College of Education at the University of Canterbury.

I am currently working on my ethical application for recruiting participants for my research project.

My research project seeks to understand teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry as part of their professional learning and development.

I would like to ask for your help in seeking primary school teachers who have experienced or are experiencing teacher inquiry.

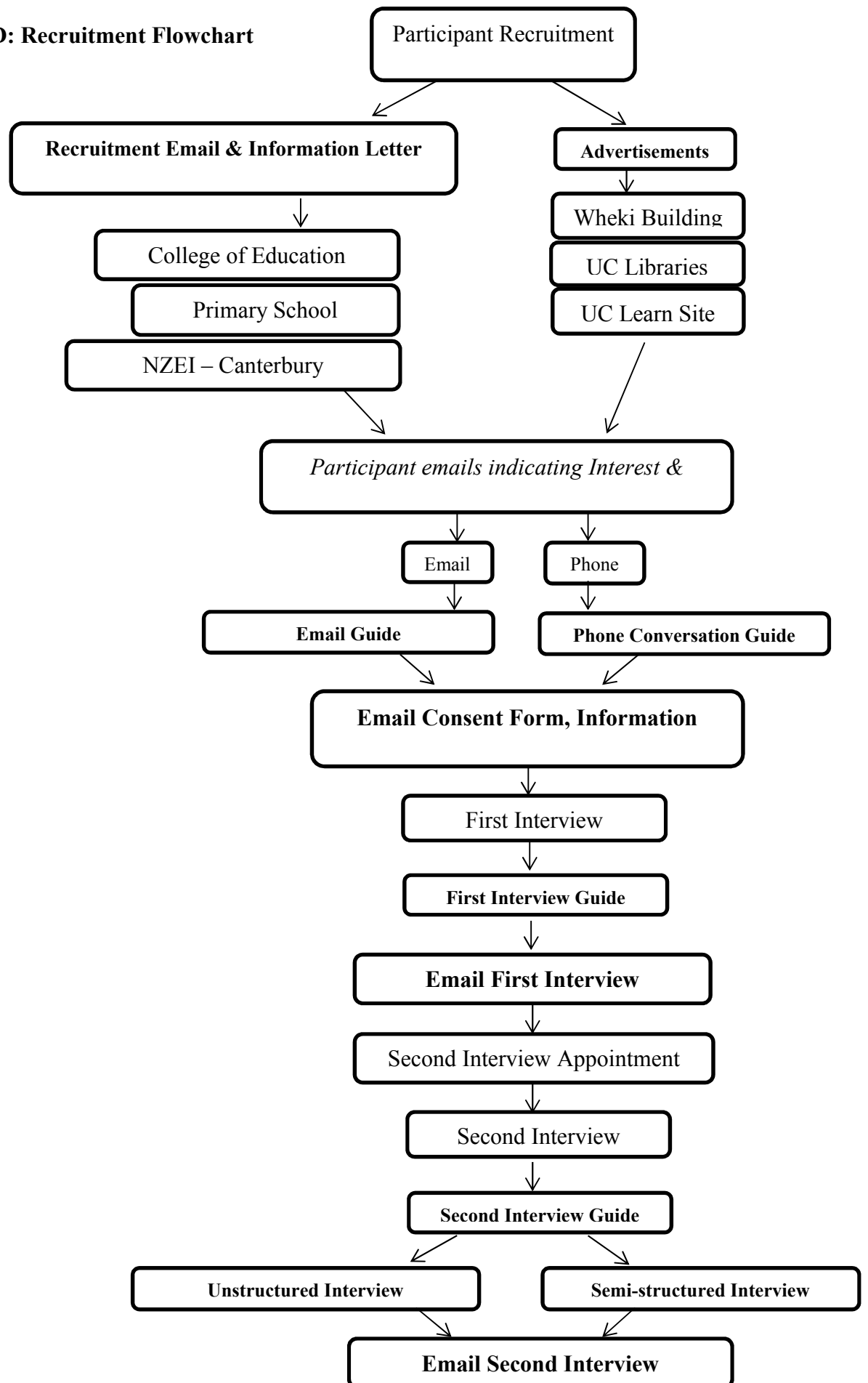
These are the two questions I have about this process.

1. Are there any special instructions or organizational guidelines to request for invitations to be extended to your members/teachers?
2. Would you be willing to forward the invitation to your members/teachers after you have approved its content?

Please advise. Thank you in advance for your help.

*Joanna Lim*

## Appendix D: Recruitment Flowchart



## Appendix E: Communication Plan

### Initial Email Guide

Dear XXX,

Thank you very much for contacting me.

As you probably know, I am interested in understanding teachers' experiences with teacher inquiry as part of their professional learning and development (PLD).

This is a brief outline of the interview process.

1. There will be at least two interviews and an anticipated length of 60 to 90 minutes per interview. The need for further interviews will be discussed and arranged if necessary.
2. All interviews will be audio-recorded and I may take notes during interviews.
3. The goal of the interview is to allow you to share your experiences of teacher inquiry. From time to time, I may interject minimally to prompt for further description or clarification of details but *the focus is on you sharing your experience in any way you feel comfortable*.
4. I will be transcribing your interviews and I will email you the transcriptions to review for accuracy and clarity in the content you shared.
5. At the end of my project, I can email you a short summary of my findings. Please provide your email details in the consent form if you would like a copy of this summary.
6. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will only be shared between my supervisory team and me.
7. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time for any reason without penalty. You may end the interview at any time if you wish.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my project.

The next step is for you to decide if you would be willing to participate in this project.

If you are willing, please provide as much information as you can below.

---

#### *First Interview: Appointment Details*

1. Interview Location (e.g. at your school/classroom, university campus or a public location):
2. Time:
3. Date:
4. Email:
5. I will be confirming our appointment 24 hours before it is scheduled. Would you like to be reminded via email or text?
6. Mobile Contact Number (Purpose = Emergencies/Appointment reminder):

To ensure confidentiality I will be using pseudonyms instead of real names. Would you like to choose yours?

7. Pseudonym:

After negotiating a suitable time, date and location to meet, I will email you a consent form, the teacher information sheet and a confirmation of our appointment.

When we meet, I will ask you to sign the consent form before we begin the interview. If you have any concerns or questions about signing the consent form, please let me know before we meet.

Thank you again for your time and I look forward to our first interview.

Joanna

Email Confirmation/Interview Approach & Definitions = Attach consent form & information letter

Dear XXX Pseudonym,

I hope it's ok to start using your chosen pseudonym. If it's weird, please let me know.

As promised, here are the details confirming our first appointment.

Interview Location:

Date:

Time:

Reminders 24-hours prior = XXX via email = XXX and text = XXX

*Please feel free to text or email me if things change. My number is XXX*

I am attaching the consent form and teacher information sheet for your perusal.

As mentioned previously, I will ask you to sign the consent form before we begin the interview.

One more thing, if you know of any other primary school teachers who would be interested in my project, please feel free to provide them with either the information letter or my email at XXX

I would like to outline the interview approach and definitions that I will be using during the interview.

Unstructured interview approach

The unstructured approach to interviewing is different because it is not the normal way of conducting interviews where you answer my questions. Think of the interview as an invitation to share your experiences and it will begin with a broad prompt to allow you to construct, shape and share your experiences however you feel most comfortable.

Definitions

Teacher inquiry is known by many names; teaching as inquiry, the teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle, and teacher action research. Teacher inquiry is different from inquiry learning which is learning through an inquiry approach.

In my research, I use the Education Review Office (ERO) definition of professional learning and development, which includes "all the formal and informal processes used to improve the knowledge and practice of teachers" (Education Review Office, 2009a, p. 1).

Teacher inquiry is a form of professional learning and development for teachers that orients and measures teachers' professional learning and development effects through student outcomes. The ERO defines teacher inquiry as "a process that involves educators investigating the impact of their decisions and practice on students" (Education Review Office, 2012b, p. 1).

Research Purpose

I am interested in listening to your story of experience with teacher inquiry as part of your professional learning and development. Your stories will contribute towards an understanding of how teachers perceive teacher inquiry as part of their professional learning and development.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns or questions before we meet.

Thank you again for your time and I look forward to our first interview.

Joanna

Interview Reminder = 24-hours before interview via Email/Text

Dear XXX Pseudonym,

As promised, here are the details confirming our first appointment for tomorrow.

Interview Location:

Date:

Time:

I have sent a text reminder to XXX.

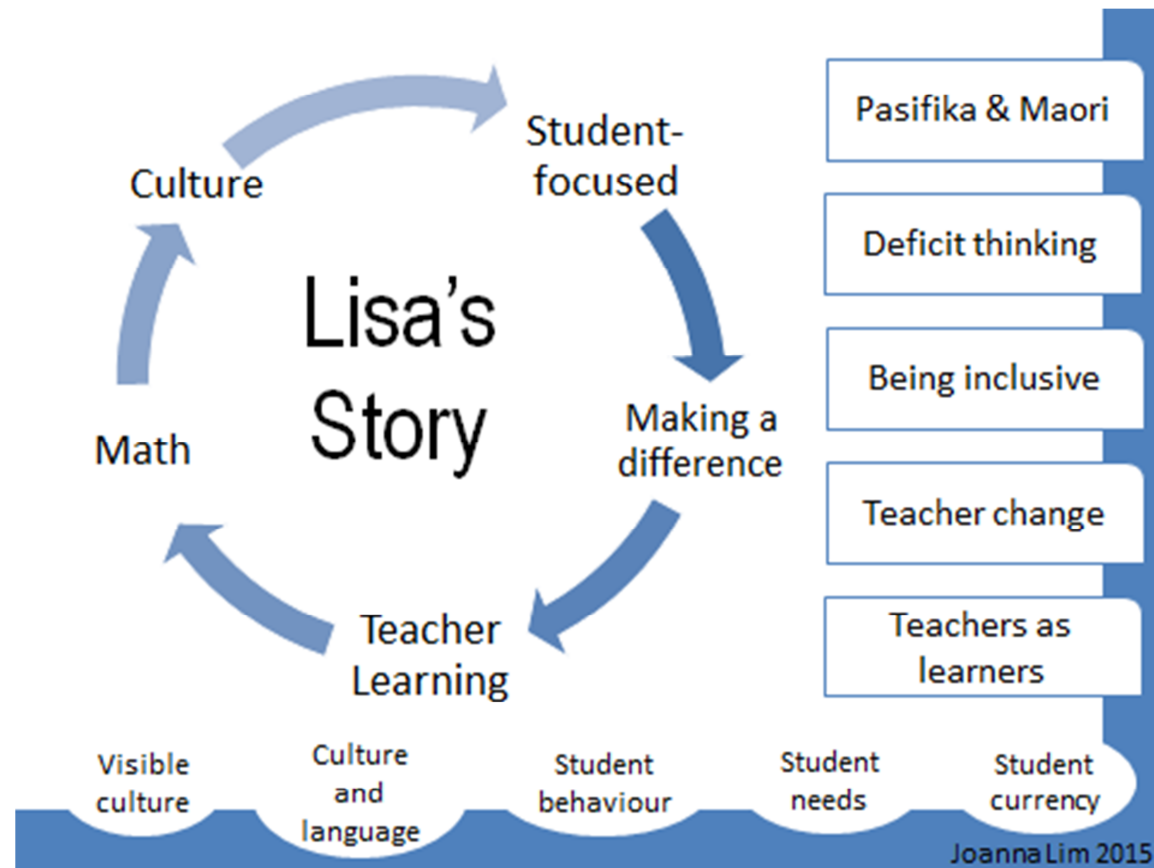
*Please feel free to text or email me if things change. My number is XXX*

Thank you again for your time and I look forward to our first interview.

Joanna

## Appendix F: Early Interpretive Forms

### Visual Collage 1



## Visual Collage 2



Images were obtained through Microsoft Clipart

Joanna Lim 2015



## A Mind Map of Narrative Threads

